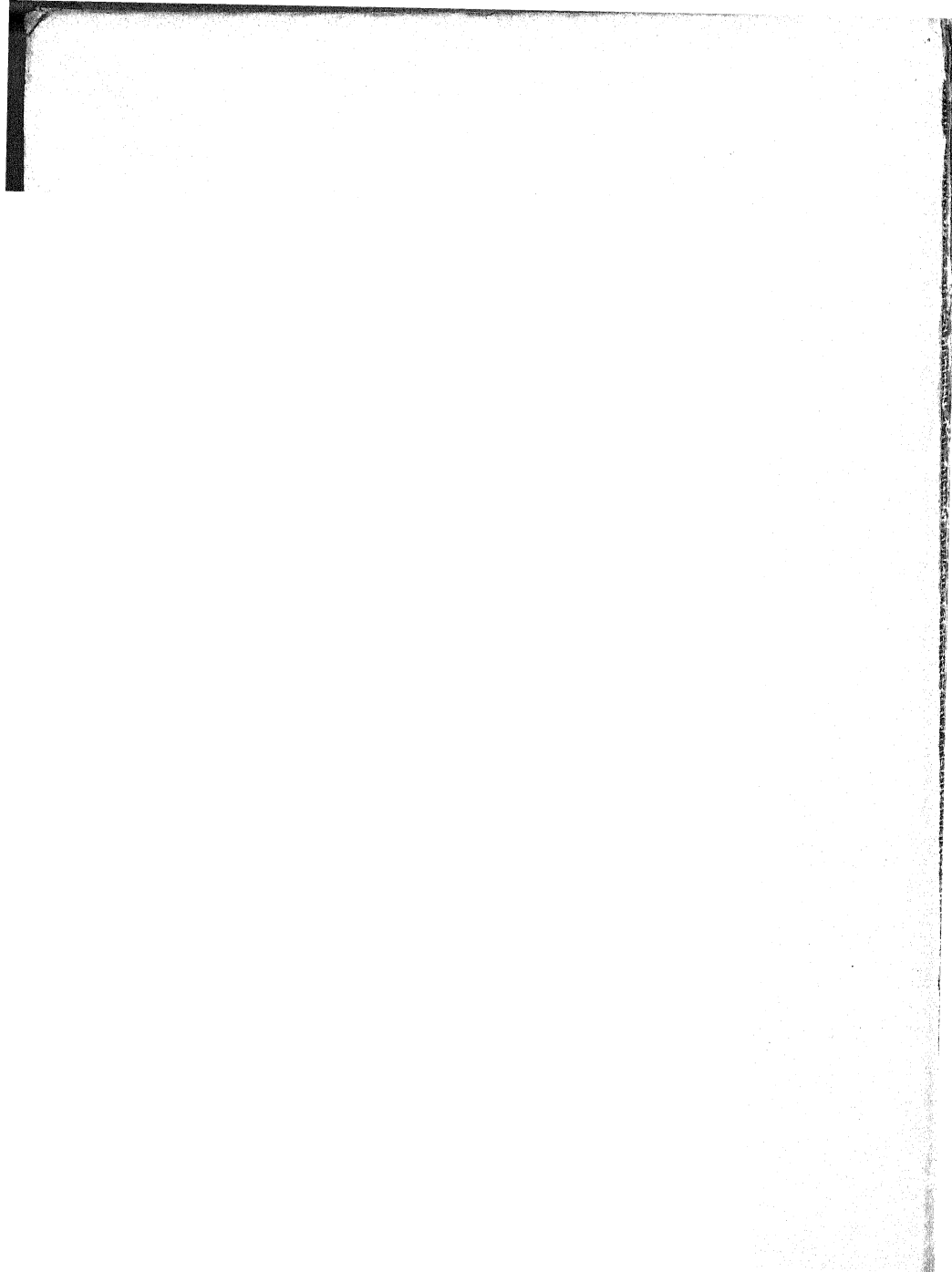


REMEMBER THE END





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REMEMBER THE END

A Novel



by

Agnes Sligh Turnbull

NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1938

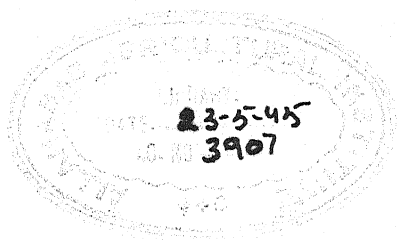
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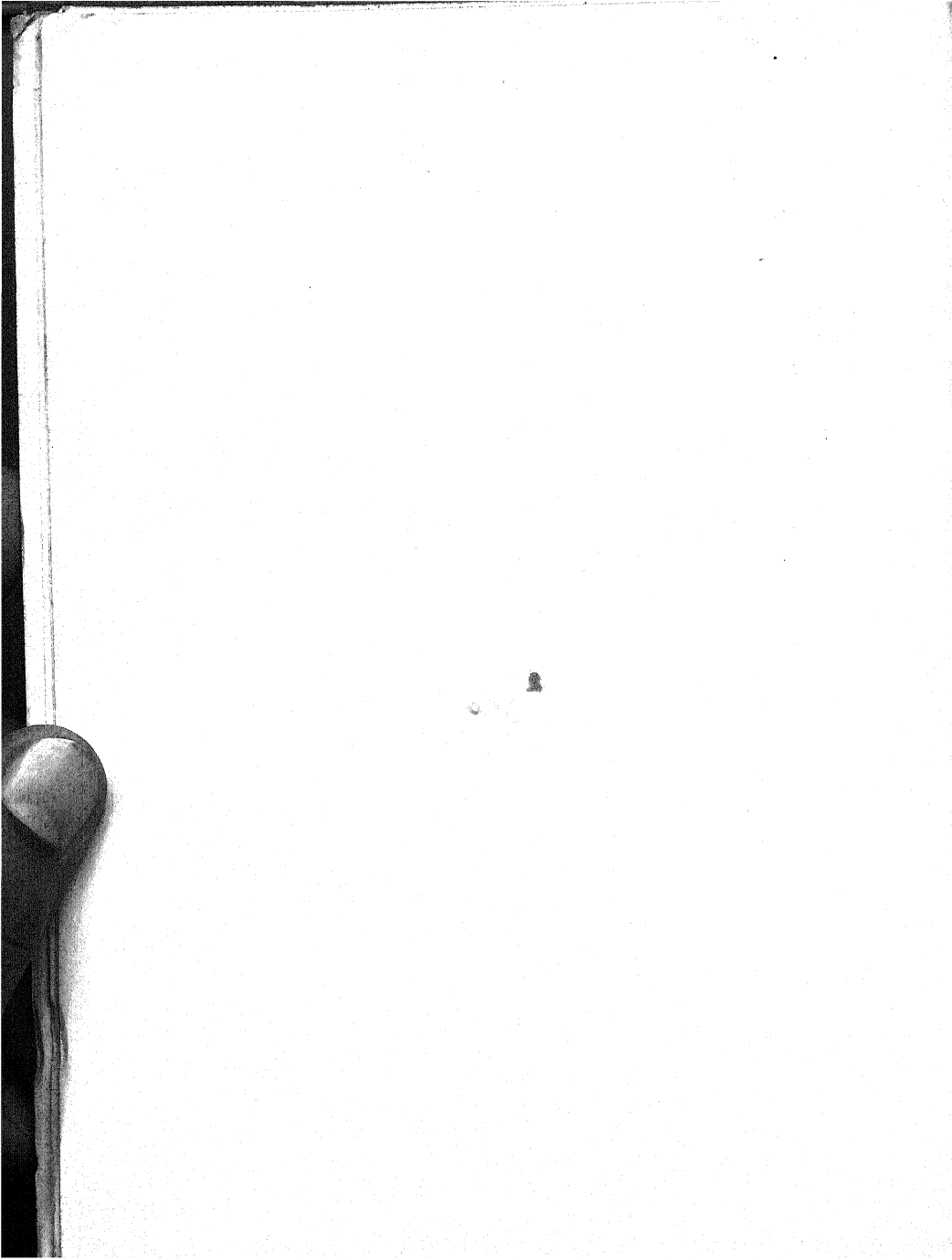
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Set up and electrotyped. Published November, 1938.

FIRST PRINTING

PROLOGUE: SCOTLAND





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ON A late March afternoon in the year 1890 old Peter Whinnery, a shepherd on the Laird's estate, walked sturdily up the grassy slope that led to the little village of Lamson Green, passed the few scattered cottages at the edge, and entered the blacksmith shop. If he had paused to look behind him, he would have seen the sun setting below the crest of the Lammermoors, throwing long veils of purple shadow on the tops of the Cheviots to the south, like the color of their own heather.

Behind him, bordering the way by which he had come, Tibbie's Glen lay inscrutably green and still, withdrawn in its own legends. On to the east of the Green, along the Great North Road, the wheat fields sloped down to meet the sea. And still beyond, though the eye just failed of it, the old walled city of Berwick drowsed upon the silver Tweed.

But while Peter frequently thought upon the beauty of his countryside as he led his sheep over the hills, his mind this afternoon, like that of the man he had come to see, was occupied with another matter.

He set his knotted stick down carefully inside the doorway, and blinked his watery blue eyes for a moment at the sooty twilight of the smiddy. Then he could discern by the forge fire at the farther end the figure of Hendry MacTay in a loose sweaty sark and leather apron, raising his powerful hairy arm to bring the hammer down upon the red-hot iron. He knew that Hendry had already sensed his presence but would, of course, give no sign of it. Peter walked slowly nearer the forge and leaned against the smoke-blackened wall.



"Aye," he said by way of preliminary when the blows of the hammer ceased, "there's streamers to the sun the night. It maun bring rain in the mornin'."

"Aye," said MacTay, turning to the forge fire.

When the iron shone red again, he looked at it critically, plunged it for a second time into the great vat of water near by where it hissed vehemently, then took up once more his shaping of it on the anvil. Peter lighted his pipe and bided his time.

The smith of Lamson Green was well known throughout the countryside. There was no farmer within ten miles who would not rather have Hendry MacTay shoe his horses and make a clevis for his plough than any other workman. But he had additional claims to fame aside from the skill and honesty of his craftsmanship. When the men gathered in the smiddy on a wet day to wait their horses' turn at the shoeing and the talk drifted from Andrew Carnegie's new "Gospel of Wealth" to the last sermon at the kirk, and back, Hendry was easily the slowest to speak but the best informed among them. Moreover, in a country where strong men were the order rather than the exception, Hendry's huge frame was proverbial for its feats of strength.

"Na, na," a father would caution his son, "dinna think you're Hendry MacTay, yet awhile!"

And around the cottage fires the story was still told with deep, though restrained racial relish, how in Hendry's youth he had bought a small coster donkey in Berwick and was returning with it one evening past Lamberton Toll. When he had paid his walker's fee, the man in charge remonstrated.

"An extra thrippence for the beast," he said.

Hendry had eyed the diminutive animal.

"Any charge for bundles?" he had asked innocently.

"Havers! You ken there isna."

Whereupon Hendry had calmly picked up the donkey and carried it to the other side.

A strong silent man, Hendry, and a teetotaler as well. Indeed

the countryside marveled much more at his temperance than at his strength. On a raw winter's day when the wind blew hard from the North Sea the men always included Hendry in their hospitality.

"You'll hae a wee nip, Hendry ma mon, won't ye, just to keep the weather on the outside of your skin?"

"Thank ye. Not at the present," was Hendry's invariable reply.

Since Peter Whinnery was a crony of thirty years' standing, he knew enough to approach his subject by cautious indirection. Even so it was uncertain whether Hendry would in any way commit himself by comment.

Peter removed his pipe and sighed heavily. "Na, na," he began tentatively, "there's no haudin' the young ones back when they take it in their heads to go. The old country's no good enough for them nowadays, it seems."

There was no reply and Peter smoked on for some minutes. Then, as though happening upon a purely irrelevant idea, he spoke again.

"It must be ten years the noo since your Tom took to sojerin'?"

Hendry answered this time. "Aye. Ten years come Michaelmas. He's done fine ever since he was sent oot to India. He's a sergeant noo, he writes."

"An' your Bertie—losh keep us a', how the time flies! Him off for Australia, an' then Jock for Canada afore the bushes were dry that their hippens hung on! An' noo it's young Alex off tomorrow for Americky." Peter paused, eyeing his companion shrewdly. "Unless," he added, "he's changed his mind overnight."

"I've never heard tell of a MacTay changin' his mind as easy as that," Hendry said calmly.

"Then he's no been tellin' you what happened at the Laird's?"

Hendry's face betrayed no interest as he shook his head and

moved about his work. Peter followed him, his mouth twitching with eagerness.

"Mon, it was like this. Ye ken the Laird's back wi' his bride, an' over the moon wi' himsel', he bein' turned forty an' her still in her twenties if I'm a judge. A bonnie bit thing she is an' all. Weel, he had us a' in the big hall last night, the shepherds an' the hinds an' the house servants, when the young blades come serenadin'. An' what should your Alex do but step out afore the gentlefolk as handsome as a fiddler an' sing a song he'd made up himsel' about the weddin'!"

Hendry stood idle now, his large hands feeling his leather apron.

"Aye," he said, "Alex makes a bit rhyme now an' again."

"But that's no the last of it, Hendry ma mon. When he got to the finish it was about the bride.

"An' ere the wheat is green again
May she be a happy mother!"

or some such like words. Weel, the Laird was fair carried away wi' it. He went up to Alex an' says, 'What's your name?' 'Alex MacTay,' he says nice an' composed. 'My father's the smith at Lamson,' he says. 'Weel,' says the Laird, 'yon's the bonniest bit verse that's been made in Scotland since the days of Bobby Burns if I'm a judge,' he says. 'I'll send you to school, my lad. You're young enough yet. Tutors, an' then Edinbory. I'll edjicate you for a poet. Are you willin'?' he says. An' Alex stands there an' looks him in the eye. 'My thanks to you, sir,' he says, 'but I'm sailin' for Americky on the Thursday.' 'Americky!' says the Laird, fair put oot, you could see. 'I'm sick o' seein' all our best laddies off to the back side of the world,' he says. 'Change your plans an' I'll have you up to Edinbory in a fortnight. I'm seerious,' he says. But Alex just smiles an' says, 'You're verra kind, sir, but my mind's set on Americky, an' I couldn't change the noo.' Now what think ye of that, Hendry?"

Peter stopped, out of breath, his eyes set on Hendry's face. The smith stood silent for a long minute. The muscles of his throat could be seen to move as though he were swallowing consciously and with difficulty. Then he picked up his hammer.

"It's a fine country, they say—Americky."

That was all, and Peter knew it was final. He knocked his pipe on the anvil and put it back into his baggy pocket. With a nod to the man beside him, he made his way to the door, collected his stick and stepped out again on the green, shaking his head and muttering to himself.

"Ach, you might as weel try to get breeks off a Highlander as get Hendry to talk when he's no a mind to. It's maist disappointin'."

He stood looking across to the neat stone cottage on a little rise of ground above the green proper. This was the home of the MacTays. There was a hedge of holly about the small garden, and thick ivy covered one side of the house. Within now, Marget and Lizzie would be preparing the tea. Poor Marget! She would be felled by this blow. Alex was her baby and the bonniest of the lot. She would know, belike, about the Laird's offer, for Lizzie would be hearing it somehow. Women always get the news. It would be almost better though for Marget if she did not know. The thoughts of what might have been would be bitter bread for her.

Peter stared at the ivy-walled cottage with a tenderness on his wrinkled face which he would have disclaimed roughly if he had been accused of it. The truth was that long years ago he had loved Marget and hoped to make her his wife. But he had never spoken. She had openly favored Hendry, and Peter's honesty had forced him to admit that his friend was the better man. So he had kept his secret to warm his heart by as best he could, and been content through the years to sit often in her chimney corner, whittling queer toys for the children when they were small, and telling them stories of Tibbie's Glen as they grew older.

He gave his shoulders a shake now and started toward the cottage.

"I might as well gie them a cry when I'm this near," he said to himself.

The door was open, and Lizzie, the only MacTay daughter, was standing in it shading her eyes with her hand as she looked away toward the Great North Road. It was a pity, everyone said, that the boys got the beauty and poor Lizzie the leavings. But since her homeliness would likely keep her single she could be the comfort and stay of her parents, at least.

When the girl spied Peter the strained look on her heavy features gave place to a smile.

"Ach, Mr. Whinnery, it's you. I've just been keepin' an eye out for Alex. He's gone to Berwick for a last look round, an' he ought to be back the noo. Come away in, Mr. Whinnery. My mother will be pleased to see you."

She led the way into the kitchen, where the teapot was brewing on the hob and Marget was setting the table with a white cloth and her best china, which as a rule was never used except when the dominie and his lady came to call.

She was as small and delicately formed as Hendry was powerful. It seemed incredible, to look at her, that she should have given birth to four stalwart sons. Her face was round, and the skin smooth and soft for all her sixty years. Her hair waved a little on either side of its parting as it had done in her girlhood. But it was her eyes that had always given the real beauty to her face. They were neither hazel nor brown nor blue, but a curious intermixture of all three like the shadows on a lake. It was her eyes and the way they sometimes looked through and past you that made the neighbors whisper that Marget was a bit fey. They told one another that she had been a Galloway lass who had grown up on the bleak moors and felt the misty wind blow over the gravestones of the martyrs as it came down from the Merrick. She had been a quiet young girl when she came to live

with her aunt near Lamson, with her big eyes shining like water and her rare, sudden smile.

When she married Hendry and set up housekeeping in the stone cottage, she had been as good a neighbor as one could ask to have. Yet no one felt as familiar with her as with the other women. No one but Marget would stand alone on a windy night looking up through the naked trees, or stop talking suddenly on a summer afternoon to look off to the sunset above the Lammermoors with her hand at her breast as though a pain had caught her. Yes, Marget was different, but a fine woman and well thought of.

"Peter!" she said now as he entered. "What a startle you give me! Come away in an' have a cup of tea. Alex'll be wantin' to see you. He ought to be home ony minute."

Then the cup began to shake in her hand.

"Is it so, Peter, what Lizzie was just hearin' from the fish-cadger? Was you at the serenade? I'm askin' you straight, Peter: Did the Laird really say such a thing?"

"Aye, he said it, seerious, mind; but I doubt Alex's no interested."

"But he will be when I speak with him! He's young, an' he wants to see the world. He just doesna realize what an edjication means. Ach, haven't I dreamed of it for him! An' I've kep' every rhyme he's ever made written doon in a tablet under the big Bible. Oh, aye," she went on, her face flushed and her lips trembling, "an' he could come hame betimes from Edinbory. Mebbe at the Christmas even. It's no such a long trip to Edinbory, Peter."

"Belike you can change him yet, Marget?"

"Aye, I'm sure I can. Such an honor comin' from the Laird! An' Alex never cheeped aboot it this mornin'. But that'll be because he was fair cowed wi' it, an' wantin' time to think it through again. He couldna refuse such a chance, an' him always quick at his books. An' he'd be hame for a good holiday in the summers! Oh, I'll set it all afore him!"

"He's comin', Mother," Lizzie called from the door. "There's a hantle of folks on the green stoppin' him to say good-bye. He's promisin' them a' a letter from Americky. Listen to him!" Lizzie's tone was fond. "You could hear him laugh a mile away! Lift the tea things, an' I'll go after Father."

There was a louder sound of voices and laughter, and then a spirited whistling of "Rabin Tamson's Smiddy," which approached the cottage until Alex suddenly filled the doorway.

"Well, Mr. Whinnery, did you come to wish me luck? Mother, is that baked herrin' I smell? and scones? Oh—aye, but that's my favorite tea-supper, an' well she knows it, don't you, Mother? I'll pay you back wi' presents when I get to Americky."

"Alex—"

"Sal, when I make my fortune I'll be sendin' you silks an' satins. An' it won't be so long, mind. There's a chance for everybody in Americky."

"Alex, lad—"

"I'm off in the mornin', Mr. Whinnery. It don't seem possible after all the years I've been savin' an' plannin'. My kist's near packed, an' all I've got to do is—"

"Alex, I'm bound to speak. You never told me aboot last night at the Laird's house. You never told me aboot his offer. But you canna pass that by, Alex! It's like a miracle."

"Ach, *that*," Alex said carelessly. "I've heard you say yoursel' that bridegrooms make easy promises. He was just feelin' pleased wi' himsel'!"

"No, Alex. You're wrong. Peter here has known him for twenty year, an' he says he was seerious. He meant it a', Alex. Ach, you *canna* refuse. It's been ay the dream of my heart to see you at the University. An' then, lad, you'd be nigh-hand us. You could come hame betimes."

The young man had been watching his mother's face with a kind of amazement. He stood now with his back to the table, his clear handsome features set, his head held high.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mother, but my heart's set on

Americky. There's no one could offer me anything to haud me back. And," he added with a gentleness that took the edge from the words, "let's have no more bletherin' about the Laird."

Marget stood still, a whiteness slowly creeping over her face. Even she, his mother, knew that a man had spoken.

She turned slowly to the fire and began lifting the fish while Alex washed in the scullery and Lizzie came back with her father.

No one spoke much during the meal except Alex, whose high spirits broke through all bounds. He praised the scones and wondered if he would get herrin' in America.

"Not wi' their tails tucked round their heads the way you bake them, Mother," he laughed. Then he went on with a lively account of his afternoon in Berwick.

"Sal, I missed nothing. It's all in my head now plain enough to last me my lifetime. Not," he added hastily, "that it'll be that long afore I come back, but I just sort of fixed everything today in my mind."

"Did you go out to the lighthouse?" Lizzie asked.

"Aye, didn't I, an' had a great crack wi' Tammas, the keeper, in his tower an' a good look out to sea. Then I went up the town hall steeple and watched the herrin' fleet come in an' spotted every red roof I knew in the town; an' then for a finish I walked all round the walls. Queer all these years I'd never done that. Well, I did it the day."

Marget's eyes never left his face as he talked. Peter, watching her, noticed that even her tea was untouched.

"Aye," he thought, "her throat'll be too full even to drink. Poor Marget!"

He left when the women had finished clearing the table and Marget was busy laying the last garments in the "kist" that stood in front of the tall clock as though mutely awaiting the appointed hour.

Peter said his farewell to young Alex briefly, almost roughly, with his eyes fixed anywhere but on his face.

"Weel, Alex, see you take care o' yoursel' in Americky."

"Nae fears, Mr. Whinnery. I'll be fine. You'll be hearin' from me!"

"Aye, drop us a line."

Lizzie followed him out on pretext of going to the well in the garden. Her homely face was wet with tears.

"Gie us a cry soon again, Mr. Whinnery, will you no? We'll be lonesome. I'm fair worrit about my mother."

"Aye, she'll be takin' it hard. I mind her after Jock left."

"But that'll no be a patch to this. Alex's her right eye. I feel afraid to see the mornin' come. She ay watches at the door till she's seen the last of the one that's leavin'; then she turns back gropin' as though she's blinded till she gets to the stairs. She climbs awfu' slow then up to her room an' locks the door. An' she fights it all oot wi' hersel' there. Naebody dares go nigh her, not even my father. It was near to two days when Jock left. It'll be mair for Alex."

"Aye," said Peter heavily, "they never seem to know when they cross the seas they take their mothers' hearts wi' them. Weel, I'll be on my way, Lizzie. I'm glad you're left at ony rate. See you don't let some callant steal you!"

"Ach, Mr. Whinnery, I doubt I'm nae temptation."

Lizzie got her pail of water and went slowly back to the house. Her father was getting the big Bible down from the shelf for "worship." They sat around the kitchen, Hendry near the lamp, his great hand spread upon the opened book, Marget beside Alex, her feet braced against the brass fender, her left hand shading her face, and Lizzie in the far corner by the scullery where she could put her apron over her head if her tears got the best of her.

Hendry's words, so few in ordinary conversation, were fluently eloquent in prayer. It was as though some deep inner reservoir was tapped by the mere physical motion of falling upon his knees. He prayed now after he had read the 121st Psalm, his voice deep but unbroken over the last lines, "The

Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore."

He prayed for the sick and the afflicted, for the minister and all his flock, and for the heathen who had heard naught of the Gospel; he prayed for Tom in India and Bertie in Australia and Jock in Canada; and then for the son who was about to cross the perilous seas to a new country. And, last, he prayed that those who bided at home might be kept in His fear and favor! Even as their physical strength waned, might the inner man be renewed day by day! . . . Amen.

Young Alex's face was sober as he got up from his knees. Hendry, who always retired and rose with the sun, got his candle without further speech, and started up the stairs. Lizzie was in the scullery, scouring the pans as she always did when she could not depend upon her self-control. Alex and Marget were alone by the fire. She put a hand out hesitantly and touched his coat, his collar, his hair. It was still light, with the curl that should have been Lizzie's.

"Ach, you're bonny, Alex," she said softly. "Let me look hard at you so I can mind you standin' here so straight an' strong wi' your eyes blue as flax an' your lips smilin' at me!"

"I'll be mindin' you too, Mother, nae fears!" His voice was husky.

"Alex!"

"Aye."

"You won't give up your rhymes? Send me a one now an' then. It'll hearten me just to read it. I'll be sayin' it to mysel' as I go about my work."

"I will, Mother."

She reached into the bosom of her dress and slowly drew out a tiny parcel wrapped in white paper. She glanced over her shoulder, but Lizzie was not watching.

"I want you to have this, Alex. Some day, you'll be fallin' in love wi' a lassie out there, an' then you can gie this to her wi' your heart. It belonged to my mother in Galloway, an' I wore

it at my own weddin'. It means more to me than any other thing I possess. Take it, Alex, an' save it for your wife. An' may she be worthy of you!"

She laid the small package in his open palm and watched him as he opened it. It was a Scotch thistle in gold curiously entwined to form a brooch. Alex gazed at it for a moment, and then, as though the man he would become reached out to the girl she once had been, he put his arms about her and kissed her. For a little space she clung to him. This was the real farewell. Tomorrow, with the cart at the door, and all the neighbors watching, she would merely wave him off down the green. Now for this small moment her heart could spend itself upon him.

Then Lizzie's footsteps were heard behind them and Marget moved away quickly to turn the socks drying on the mantel rail.

Lamson Green went early to bed, before the long twilight had definitely resolved itself into night. A small moon like an arc of hope hung low above the Lammermoors, and a few stars besprinkled the sky, when Marget looked out the door before she went upstairs. The rest of the family were already settled for the night. All that her craving hands could do for the traveler had now been done. The clean socks he would put on in the morning had been smoothed and folded, his shirt ironed, his coat brushed, his shoes shined. The kist was locked and strapped. There was a finality about it now, she thought as she turned to glance at it. Lamson Green, even Scotland itself was already shut out of it. The garments within, like the man who wore them, would know these places no more.

For Marget did not deceive herself. All the talk of youth about coming back meant nothing. The lads never came back. The old clock here that had belonged to the MacTays for two hundred years would tick on until it had rounded out her lifetime. But she would never see Alex again. Her last born. Her best beloved. The sea would part them as surely as the grave.

And what would his fortunes be yonder? What was it that called to them that they had to answer, Tom and Bertie and

Jock and Alex? They would never see a fairer country than the one they left behind them. There was work here and a living. There were bonny lassies to wed. And for Alex besides this, there might have come fame and honor if he had only been content to bide.

But some voice called out to them, and they followed it to the earth's ends. Could it be the voice of God himself, she wondered, or was it that thing the dominie was always calling destiny?

At last Marget closed the door quietly and snibbed it, blew out the light, and went up to her room. She listened in the darkness to Hendry's slumber. There was a break in it as though he had been unconsciously waiting for her. She went softly to the bed and lay down beside him with her clothes still on, until she heard his breathing become regular once more. Then she got up, reached for an old shawl that hung on a chair, and left the room, stepping cautiously on the boards that did not creak. She crossed the narrow upper hall and opened the door of the room opposite with stealthy skill. She listened. He was fast asleep already! At twenty-one it's the body that has its way, she thought.

There was a stool by the window. She picked it up and set it close by the bed. Here, huddled in the old shawl she could sit till daybreak, near enough to touch him, close enough to feel his breath. A shiver shook her, but she set her teeth together. She must not break yet. There was still this night.

Softly, as though by gradual illumination, his face became plain to her. The broad brow below the light curly hair, the heavy darker lashes, the long, strongly molded nose, the wide mouth and positive chin. She could feel the strength of him even as he lay there. He had his father's limbs, she thought, and the clean smell of the body that comes from perfect health.

She sat very still, sometimes touching his hair or his hands or just the quilt that covered him. The hours went by swiftly. They were all she had, but there was no holding them. Heart-

lessly, relentlessly, the old clock below told them off. At two a wind blew up from the sea, and by three the rain was falling. There was only one hour more. She leaned over him, her lips moving.

When the clock struck four she went back to her own room, and was busying herself at the bureau when Hendry awoke.

"You up, Marget?"

"Aye."

"It's rainin'?"

"Aye."

"Peter said there was streamers to the sun last night."

"Aye. You'd better wake Alex soon. The cart's to be here by six."

But it was only five-thirty when Shorty Allison drove up to the door. He had been engaged to take Alex and his chest to Berwick where he would get a train for Glasgow. Hendry, with one easy lift, set the small trunk in the back of the cart. Lizzie handed Alex the package of lunch, and no one spoke.

Then Hendry held out his hand to his son, his eyes roving off toward the mountains.

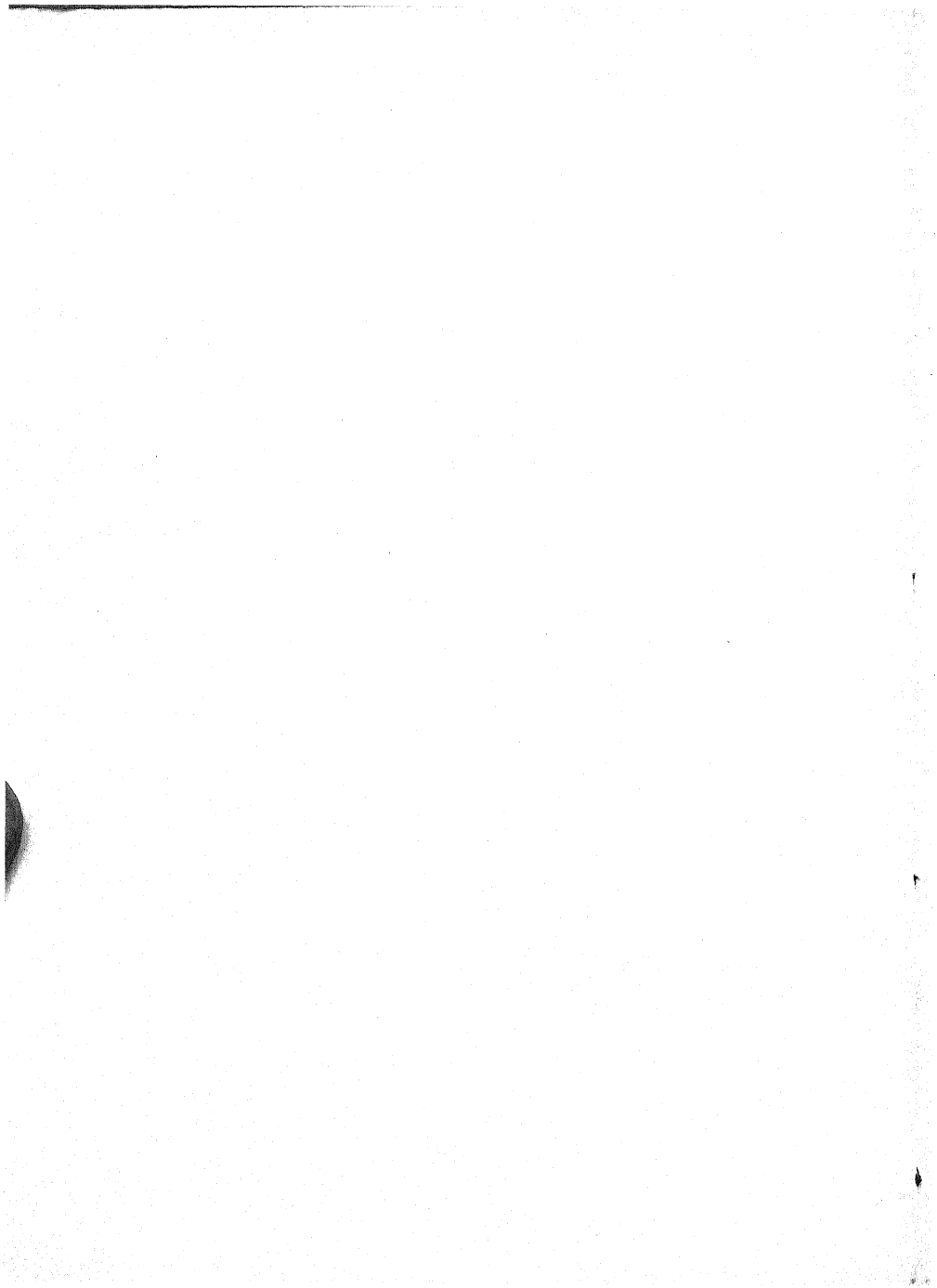
"Good-bye, Alex," he said from a stiff throat. "Let us be hearin' from you."

With a quick movement, Alex shook hands with Lizzie, kissed his mother, and sprang into the cart beside Shorty. As they turned from the village into the main road he stood up smiling and waved his cap at the group by his own door and the neighbors on the Green. Then the little crowd slowly dispersed, and Hendry, without words, walked over to the smiddy.

Marget and Lizzie stood together, watching the cart out of sight. Once more at the last turn Alex stood up and waved his cap; then he was lost to view.

Lizzie saw her mother move then, fumbling for the doorstep. Like a very old woman she crossed the floor, slowly, unsteadily, until she reached the stairs. But Lizzie could not watch her as she climbed them.

AMERICA



CHAPTER I

ON ONE of those chill days in April when winter repents its departure and hastens back in a gust of sleet and snow, the good ship *Turania* docked at Philadelphia after one of the roughest crossings in her history, and deposited among others from the steerage a young Scotchman in a Glengarry cap, tight corduroy trousers, and a thick brown jacket. He had walked unsteadily down the gangplank into the new world, and now sat on his chest on the docks, disconsolately looking about him. This was not the brave entrance into America which he had intended to make. Nor was the shabby wharf with its confusion of noises and unfamiliar accents the picture he had somehow carried in his mind as that upon which his eyes would first dwell.

In all the years in which he had planned for the great voyage he had never reckoned with the fact that he might be seasick on the crossing. But while the first week had gone well enough with four of them in the cabin to joke and bandy stories about, and the windy deck upon which to walk off the effects of the none too palatable food, the second week had shut them in to a close air, heavy with intolerable smells and the violent lurching and pitching of the ship in a storm.

When the worst was over and the other men had once again struggled up to the deck, Alex, who in all his life had known no ailment of the body but a slight hoast (cough) occasionally when he had been out in the winter rain all day, discovered that the steady roll of the vessel still sent him sprawling ignominiously back to his bunk.

Pat Crowdey, the only one of his cabin-mates near his own

age, had come on board one misty midnight when the ship stopped at Londonderry, and seemed now like an old friend. He brought tea from the tables and talked cheerfully of how fine it would all be when they landed.

"I've got a train trip lasts the night, they tell me, before I get to me uncle's. An' that's not a pinch of the distance across the States. Sure, Alex, it's a great country."

Alex assented weakly. But for the first time his plan of securing work in Philadelphia, when he got there, did not sound as simple as it had when he had walked whistling through Tibbie's Glen, dreaming of the vast opportunities that lay waiting for him at the end of the journey.

On the day before landing Pat had spoken to him seriously.

"You're in no shape to be left by your lone in a strange city. Why don't you come along with me to Pennsylvania? Me uncle would take you in till you get a job. He's on a farm, there, an' he wrote me there's always work about the countryside. It's the train trip that's the worst. It'll cost you near three pound."

"I've got a few extra," Alex said.

"Will ye come then?"

"I'm thinkin' I will," said Alex, grasping as he realized at the one straw of friendliness held out to him, throwing over in a breath his plan to stay in Philadelphia. For curiously enough, as he realized now, in all his dreams of America the actual landing there had had no place in his mind. Rather he had seen himself always as settled, the possessor of a decent job, working hard, of course, but laying up money, "gathering gear," being promoted, becoming a prominent citizen in the country of his election. Jock was doing well in Canada and Bertie in Australia. Their letters sounded cheerful and prosperous. Had they known this empty, sinking feeling when they landed on strange shores? Had they known but never told of it?

He sat now on the dock, staring about him, trying desperately to recapture the high spirits in which he had left Scotland, along with the clear head and steady legs to which he had been

accustomed, all his life, while Pat went to convert their pounds into dollars, and buy their railroad tickets to an unknown destination called Greensburg.

It was seven o'clock in the evening when they boarded their train. After a strong cup of tea and a bit of lunch at a counter Alex felt more like himself. The ground beneath him ceased to roll, and the roof above stopped going around in unreasonable circles. He climbed the steps of the day coach with something of his old strength, although his heart was still heavy with a vague disappointment which he could not entirely coerce into words. In regard to his sudden decision to take this long train trip with Pat, farther into the new country, he felt it a weakness in himself to have changed his original plan so easily. On the other hand, he reasoned, he was by experience more of a farmer than a townsman, having hired out each summer on his uncle's place near Lamson since he was a lad in his early teens. But he had also a sure conviction that he could succeed in any job he undertook. He was clever with figures and had what his mother called a nose for a bargain. He had always pictured himself in America as a business man. Yet here he was, starting off blindly toward a farming community. He wondered unhappily whether by yielding he had lost the chance that might have been his in a great city.

The darkness came on early with the sharp sleet beating against the windows. All of the country Alex had seen before nightfall looked drab and unkempt compared to the fruitful neatness of the Scottish countryside. It was with relief that he saw it finally shut away from view. Pat in the seat in front had made himself comfortable after a fashion by removing his coat and using it for a pillow. Alex followed his example, rolling his Glengarry cap inside the jacket. His long legs hitched about for a convenient angle, but when the yellowish gas lights were finally turned lower by the conductor and the train made ready for its night's climb over the mountains, the two young immigrants from the British Isles were asleep, their dreams busy with

what had already and irrevocably become the past in Lamson Green and Kildare, while their bodies were being borne swiftly on into their future in the new world.

The chill of the early morning wakened Alex. He sat up, dazed at first by his strange surroundings, and shivering as he put on his coat and cap. Pat, he saw, was still asleep. He stood up to ease his benumbed legs, and then settled himself again by the window to watch the daylight widen over the unfamiliar hills. The feeling of hope unfulfilled was still heavy in his breast as he saw the countryside through which he was passing. The little towns looked straggling and shabby, the farms but half cultivated, the frame houses flimsy and cheap. But slowly as he watched hill rising upon hill, and fields with no house at all in sight, stretching away to the horizon, a wonder began to grow within him. Here was space, here was largeness, here was land unconfined, only waiting apparently for hands to tame it and teach it fruitfulness.

Alex squared his shoulders and drew a long breath.

"There's room here for a man to grow, I doubt, if he can just thole it in the meantime," he murmured.

"Eh?" said a voice at his elbow.

It was the conductor, his weary eyes peering at him through steel-rimmed glasses.

"You speakin' to me, young man?"

Alex smiled and shook his head.

"Fresh from the old country, ain't you?"

"Aye. From Scotland."

"You are, eh? Come over to make your fortune, I s'pose. Well, I hope you do better than some of us fellows that was born here. You an' the young Irisher gettin' off at Greensburg?"

"Aye. That's the place," said Alex.

"Better wake him up, then. We'll be there in half an hour."

Pat was in fine fettle when he had yawned, stretched, shaken himself like a setter, and collected his belongings.

"It may be shank's mare for us from Greensburg on," he said, "but there's a man I'm to see in the town first. Me uncle sent me his name . . . I've got it in this letter: Mr. Andrew McKelvey, 349 North Main Street. We'll go there first an' see himself an' ask him how to get to the farm. Me uncle would have met us, but there was no way of tellin' the day."

They clambered down the steps, stiff from their night's cramped slumbers, and hurried anxiously to the baggage room to assure themselves that their chests from which they had both separated with misgivings in Philadelphia, were really there. The fact that they were was deeply comforting. So far, the new country had done honorably by them.

By nine o'clock they had drunk a strange bitter beverage called coffee in a cheap little restaurant, where the pert waitress merely laughed at the idea of tea at that hour, had struggled with the new coins in payment, and finally started to find the office of the man Pat had been bidden to seek. It was an old brick building that they located at last with a narrow, musty stairway, which smelled of stale cigars and dental drugs, leading to the upper floors. They climbed it slowly, pausing on each landing to survey nervously the names on the office doors.

"He'll be a solicitor, belike," said Alex.

"Indade I don't know what he is, but it's always good to be civil, as the old woman said when she curtsied to the devil, so let's try to kape smooth tongues in our heads."

It was at the last turning of the top floor that they read: Andrew McKelvey, Attorney-at-Law, in somewhat worn gilt lettering on the glass.

"Chap at the door, man, an' let's get on with it," Alex said hastily.

Pat rapped sharply, and a voice called, "Come in."

They entered a square office lined on two sides with books. A large desk stood in the middle of the room littered with papers, writing materials, boxes, files, and a tall silk hat. Behind the desk sat a man of perhaps sixty, big-boned and thin, with gray-

ish hair brushed severely from the brow and curling with irrepressible abandon at the back of his head, and a tuft of chin whiskers darker than the hair. He looked at the young men from his shabby swivel chair, his eyes keen and intent, his mouth, sagging at one corner, unsmiling.

To Alex's amazement he suddenly spat a huge mass of dark liquid with perfect accuracy into a large brass receptacle that stood on the floor beside the desk.

"Is it Mr. McKelvey himself?" asked Pat.

"It is," said the man before them.

"Me uncle Jim Crowdey told me to stop to see you when I got this far, and ye'd tell me how to get on from here. Me own name's Patrick Crowdey, an' this lad is Alex MacTay, one of me cabin-mates on the ship."

Mr. McKelvey rose to what seemed an unusual height, topping Alex's own six feet by several inches, and held out a lean hand to each of them in turn. Without smiling, he yet conveyed a curiously warm welcome to the strangers. This was due largely to the preoccupation with which he studied them, as though, far from intruding upon his time, they had suddenly become the most important consideration of his life.

"Patrick Crowdey," he said slowly, "from, I take it, Ireland."

"Kildare, sir, an' you can be callin' me Pat."

"Thank you, Pat. And this is Alex MacTay from—"

"Scotland, sir. Near Berwick."

"Sit down, lads, sit down. So it's more new blood for old Westmoreland County, eh? Well, we can stand it, I guess. An Irishman's good, and a Scotchman's good. But when you harness the two, you've got an unbeatable combination. I'm Scotch-Irish myself," he added dryly. "Now let's hear your plans."

"Mine is to get to me uncle's as quick as possible," Pat said. "If you'll be kind enough to direct me I'll be off soon, for I know he's waitin' anxious to see me. Alex here's comin' along. I was tellin' him there'd be a job somewheres around for him."

"What sort of a job do you want?" McKelvey asked, fixing his shrewd eyes on Alex's face.

"I'm no partic'ler. Anything will do. For a start," he added quickly.

McKelvey's eyes narrowed with interest.

"You have ambitions, then," he said.

Alex flushed, but he kept his glance steady.

"If I hadn't I wouldn't be here, I doubt."

McKelvey turned to Pat.

"Now," he began, "your problem's simple. Jim Crowdey, your uncle, whom I know well, has a good farm and no sons. You'll fit right in there like a pocket in a shirt. But I don't think he can use two extra men and I don't know anything else in that immediate neighborhood for MacTay here. I was wondering—"

He scrutinized Alex again thoughtfully, rubbing a long forefinger along his nose.

"There's a man lives out beyond New Salem—I've known him for thirty years; Bill Parkinson's his name. Kindest man you ever knew and honest as the day's long—except when he's trading horses. He's married to a fine woman and they've always lived on her farm—the old MacIntosh place. Good farm, too, but Bill never seems to make it pay. Of late years he's opened a coal bank in one of his fields. Good coal, and plenty of people to buy it; but last time I was there the water had run in on it, and he'll never have gumption enough to open up another one. He'll just go on selling horses or talking politics over the fence with every peddler that passes. He has, as you might say, a more philosophical than practical bent. Well!"

He stopped, still looking hard at Alex. "It just strikes me that if a young fellah who wasn't afraid of work and had a few ideas in his head took hold of the place out there, it might be worth his while."

"I'm thinkin' it might," Alex said seriously.

"You'd be willing to tackle the job?"

"Aye."

"Of course this all depends upon whether Bill will take a hired man. They don't usually stay long with him, for he's always short of ready money to pay them. But if things there ever got in working order there would be ready cash. You see my point?"

"Aye," Alex said again, this time slowly.

The change in inflection did not miss McKelvey's ear. He rubbed his nose again and said kindly: "That's my best judgment, young man. Take it or leave it. No hard feelings. If you'd rather go on with Pat to his uncle's and run the chance of getting on with some of the farmers round there, that's all right."

Alex considered. His head was clearing, and his body was becoming the dependable unit to which he was accustomed. But his heart was still heavy. The intensity of his desire to come to America had been for years like a fire in his bones. America! There had been a magic in the very word that moved him as some of his friends had been moved by love of a girl. His dreams since he was sixteen had centered upon the dramatic beauties of the new country. He had hoarded cheap pictures of New York harbor, Niagara Falls, the Rocky Mountains!

And now the reality was different from all his eager postulating. And he himself, committed to whatever the strange land held in store for him by the very irrevocableness of his being within it, was about to go to a run-down farm with a swamped coal bank to work for uncertain wages with a ne'er-do-well horse trader.

Or was he? Would it not be better to go on with Pat and see what turned up there?

He studied McKelvey, who was now talking to Pat. He had his mother's infallible eye for character. All unbidden, and with a poignant vividness, some of her frequent comments on people swept through his mind.

"Na, na, I canna thole her. She's too sweet to be wholesome." Or, "Dinna go too far wi' yon man. He's got a shifty way about him." And her favorite commendation, "You can

trust him round Johnny Groat's an' back. He's got a straight pair of eyes, an' his ears is set neat on his head!"

The man before him had these requirements and something more: a quality of power which Alex recognized instinctively and respected. He spoke now so suddenly that the other two started.

"I'll be goin' to this Parkinson man's place, sir, and thank ye for the advice."

"Good," said McKelvey, and almost smiled.

It was settled then that Pat should go on to his uncle's with a neighboring farmer who McKelvey knew was in the county seat that day. McKelvey himself would drive Alex out beyond New Salem to his friend's in order to see if the plan he had suggested would work.

The two lads said good-bye in the shadow of the old courthouse. They parted like friends of years' standing who three weeks before had never heard of each other.

"An' mind now, I'm thankin' you, Pat, for all you've done for me. I'll not be forgettin' it."

"Ach, it was nothing, but it's missin' you I'll be now. We'll meet up again, Alex, an' may it be soon. Good luck to ye, an' may ye find your legs under your own table some day!"

"Aye, an' you the same! Good luck, Pat!"

Alex was very quiet as, settled on the seat of the high buggy which McKelvey had procured at the livery stable, with his small chest wedged in the back, he found himself out of the town and on a muddy country road. The day was surprisingly sunny and warm after the night of sleet, and Alex felt his heart lift a little as he breathed the fresh air with the smell of April in it.

McKelvey himself was silent until after several miles a turn of the road brought into a view a small settlement of red-painted houses huddled close together. A towering heap of a fine dusty black substance stood in the background along with strange-looking tipples and derricks.

"That, figuratively speaking," said McKelvey, pointing with the whip, "is the horse I'm putting my money on. And if I were a young man, come to this corner of the world with the idea of making a fortune—and I gather that is your idea—"

"I can't deny I'm hopin' for it at least, sir."

"Why try to deny it? There are few enough young fellows who know where they want to go and head toward it. Now, what I started to say was that if I were young myself I would pin my fortunes to coal. That's the thing we're going to hear from in the next twenty-five years, Alex! That black stuff the Lord hid away under all these farms round here is going to make and break a good many men. At least that's my opinion."

After a few more miles, McKelvey turned the horse suddenly to the left. Alex's eyes had already caught sight of a church steeple, and white houses showing between trees. A real town apparently lay just beyond, guarded by the mantling green hills around it. He looked up questioningly at McKelvey who at the moment had a peculiar grin upon his thin lips.

"That's New Salem," he said pointing again with the whip. "Great little old town. Ordinarily we would have driven through it, but just now I'm not so popular there with some folks; so I guess we'll just circumnavigate it a little."

He shoved the tall silk hat a little farther back on his head, spat deftly over the wheel, clucked to the horse, and then looked sidewise at Alex.

"I'll tell you about it," he said. "You're bound to hear it anyway. 'Bout a month ago we had a personal injury case that just about hung on the testimony of a witness from New Salem. If we could discredit him we had a chance to win. Now the trouble was that the witness, old Doc Wallace, is a fine old man. Couldn't pick a flaw in his character if you tried. Good doctor, too. So I was stumped."

He grinned broadly again.

"But there's always a way out, Alex. Just you remember that, my lad. There's always a way. One night along about two o'clock

in the morning I got an idea. I sent a fellah out to New Salem next day to snoop around the cemetery and ask a few civil questions here and there. He brought me back twelve names off tombstones of folks that had been Doc Wallace's patients. Some dead now thirty years. But the jury didn't know that," he added chuckling.

"Well, when the Doc came on the stand I just said, 'Did you know Tom Link of New Salem?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Patient of yours?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Where is he now?' 'He's dead.' 'Did you know Bill Hart?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Patient of yours?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Where is he now?' 'He's dead!' "

McKelvey laughed softly.

"I went down the list, fast as I could reel 'em off. Answers always the same. Old Doc never got the idea till it was too late, and by that time I had the jury."

"You won then, sir?" asked Alex, laughing too.

McKelvey squinted off across the fields. "I sort of make it a habit to win my cases," he drawled. "Only trouble is sometimes I have to keep out of a few folks' way afterwards. Always blows over though, always blows over!"

They had reached the crest of a hill now from which a wide expanse of countryside could be seen. Alex's glance quickened. This was more like his dreams. Along the eastern horizon were dimly etched in blue the outlines of the Laurel Ridge, while all around and between as though drawn in by the rapturously careless hand of a god, were the rolling hills, the highest of them wooded, and the lower white now with orchard bloom, brown-furrowed from the recent ploughing, or dressed in the living green of the new wheat! Alex watched it, fascinated. No farming scene in Scotland could compare with this vastness of beauty, or richness of woodland.

"Over there," McKelvey was saying, "where you see that red-roofed barn, is Bill Parkinson's place. Old Mrs. MacIntosh lives with them. Great old character. She'll be glad to welcome some

one from the old country. No love lost between her and Bill, but otherwise I think they all get along pretty smooth."

The buggy suddenly creaked and swayed as they started down the other side of the hill. The horse, spattered with the cold, thick mud, held back staunchly. Alex, unprepared for the sudden descent, grasped the side rods, while McKelvey gave all his attention to the driving. As they reached the lower level where the road wound along a stream, the mud became hub-deep. The horse ploughed slowly through it while the buggy strained and lurched from rut to rut.

"Roads like this in Scotland?" McKelvey inquired.

"No, sir," Alex answered explosively. "I've never seen anything like this before."

"And you haven't seen the worst of it. February and March—they're the months to see how bad roads can get round this county. I've seen that last hill a glare of ice that even the sharpest horse could hardly get down. And this bottom here! Bill Parkinson was coming along once with a load of wood and he got stuck and had to leave the wagon here nearly a week. Oh, we've great highways all right! Your old Romans would have had some fun if they'd ever got this far with their road making. Wish to thunder they had," he added as the buggy sank to a more perilous level.

In a few minutes more, however, they had started up another hill, this time a short and gradual slope, with the horse able to extricate his feet with reasonable ease. They jogged around a fallow field on the level, and were suddenly at their journey's end. Alex saw then that the road itself divided the farm. Above it, almost hidden from view along the way they had come by a small blooming orchard, stood the house, a large white clapboard with a low front porch running entirely across the front. There was a neat walk up to it, and another leading around the side to the back door. Upon the house and yard there was the unmistakable stamp of neatness and care.

But below the road, the barn and its environs lay in a state of

incredible disorder. The stable door hung on one hinge; the barnyard fence was broken in a half-dozen places; old wagons, a sled, and a sleigh stood about here and there, taking the weather dispiritedly, while a decrepit-looking shed seemed to be about to give up the effort of standing at all.

McKelvey pulled the horse up at the hitching post, and pointed a long finger at the scene.

"There's your first introduction to Bill Parkinson," he said. "Down at the foot of that field, see?"

Alex, looking beyond the disarray of the foreground, saw the figures of two men leaning over a fence engaged apparently in earnest conversation.

"That's Bill," McKelvey went on. "He's a Presbyterian, and Henry Mull, the man he's got treed there, is a Methodist. Bill's layin' out Calvinism to him, you can bet your life. He'd rather argue predestination than plough a field any day. But you'll find the womenfolks as substantial as Bill is windy. Come on. We'll go in."

McKelvey led the way up the sidewalk, spoke to the collie that lay on the back porch, and knocked at the door. A tall, full-bosomed woman opened it, dressed in a dark calico dress and blue-checked apron. Her face had a curious serenity as though she had long ago come to peaceful terms with herself. She smiled at them now, without surprise, and welcomed them in.

"Well, Mrs. Parkinson," McKelvey said, "I've brought you a boarder if you'll have him. A young lad fresh from Scotland, Alex MacTay."

"I'm pleased to see you," she began in a soft, slow voice, when an interruption came from the far corner of the kitchen.

"What's that? What's that? Come away in, Andy McKelvey, and don't stand gawkin' there when there's news to be told. You're a sight for sore eyes yourself, an' what's this I hear about a lad from the old country?"

McKelvey laughed and piloted Alex across to where old Mrs.

MacIntosh sat regally in a stiff wooden rocker, her knitting in her lap and her cane beside her. She wore a white cap untied at the throat, and a black sateen apron, Alex noted, as the old ladies did in Scotland. In fact the very tone of her voice carried him back to Lamson Green.

"Ach," she was saying, "I'd know you were a Scotchman if I met you in Puckity. What part do ye hail from?"

"Near Berwick."

"Aye, that's fine country. I'm Ayrshire mysel'. Here, sit you down, both of you. Where did you find him, Andy?"

By the time the explanations were over Alex had taken stock of his surroundings. The big kitchen was immaculate and comfortable. The wide floor boards were scrubbed almost white, with strips of rag carpet laid here and there. The table at one side was spread with a fresh red tablecloth, and the plates were turned down neatly over the knives and forks. Savory odors came from the big stove in the corner, both from the pots and skillets upon it and from the string of dried herbs hanging above, which swayed lightly as the breaths of steam rose.

For the rest of the furniture there were two more rockers with red calico cushions, straight wooden chairs for the table, a dough tray, a reel from a past day, and a large shelf upon which sat several glass lamps with shining chimneys, and a neat array of papers, almanacs, and books. Along the wall by the door were rows of hooks from which hung all manner of old coats, capes, shawls, hats—and something else. This last object caught Alex's eye and held it. And as he watched it, he was conscious of a quickening of his pulse, as though all his mother's Galloway blood were crying in his veins with a strange prescience. The object was a knitted hood of light blue yarn which hung by knotted ribbons from a lower hook. It was not, he knew at once, the property of either Mrs. Parkinson or Mrs. MacIntosh.

He heard the old lady's shrill laugh now as she tapped McKelvey on the shoulder.

"Ach, I declare you can smell spareribs an' suet puddin' clear

to Greensburg! Not that you deserve a meal, after your trickery! Oh, we heard of it. Shame on ye! But I'll tell you this much, Andy: I'd rather have ye with me in a law court than again me!"

"Mrs. MacIntosh," Andrew answered solemnly, "that is one of the few compliments on my professional ability that I prize. Coming from a lady of your judgment, your perspicacity—"

"Aw, get along wi' ye, an' stop your bletherin'. You an' the lad here, get into the pantry yonder an' wash your hands for dinner. I think Marget's about gaun to ring the bell for Bill."

Then with sudden bitterness in her tone she added, "It's a pity to stop him if he's workin', but I s'pose he'll think he must eat like the lave."

Tirzah Parkinson's calm countenance showed no sign of change at this outburst. She went out the back door and rang the dinner bell that hung from its high wooden framework beside the walk, then returned and lifted the smoking foods to the table. She had served them, too, and they were partly eaten before the man of the house appeared. The door opened then as though a gust of wind had blown it and with every appearance of tremendous haste, Bill entered the kitchen.

"Well, well, well!" he blustered, rubbing his hands and eyeing the guests. "Now it's too bad I'm late. Just been ploughin' the lower field there. You know how it is for us farmers! Spring weather brings spring work."

"Humph," grunted Mrs. MacIntosh.

"Here's your plate all ready for you, Bill," his wife put in mildly.

"An' how are you, Andy? I've been wantin' to get into town to see you but I've been kept pretty busy this while back, one thing an' another."

"If you'll excuse me," Mrs. MacIntosh put in sharply, "I'll be goin' back to my knittin'."

She took her stick and with great definiteness punctuated her steps back to the rocker by the window, while Bill busied himself with his food. As soon as she was settled he turned to his

guests inquiringly, and acknowledged with interest the introduction to the stranger. Alex noticed then that he had a disarming twinkle in his eye and a wide, friendly mouth. He felt he could get on with this man.

When dinner was over the men, by common consent, got their hats and went outside. Bill led the way to the barn with an air of pleased secrecy. Once or twice he chuckled and winked at Andy. Alex following along behind had an empty feeling within him in spite of the hearty dinner. Without being unintelligible the conversation had all seemed foreign to him. Growing steadily upon him was the desperate fear that the malady called homesickness was already attacking his vitals. He passed through the sagging stable door, his eye noting mechanically where the new hinge should go, passed the cow stalls, and went on to where the horses were lodged. Here Bill paused and pointed out a bay horse with a white patch on his nose.

"There," he announced, "is an animal that's goin' to give me more satisfaction than any piece of horseflesh I ever dealt in."

"What are his big points?" McKelvey asked.

"Points!" Bill shouted, laughed uproariously. "There hain't no more point to that beast than there is to a bull's nose. Listen," he said lowering his voice suddenly. "I don't want to tell this too loud, but this here's the story. You know young Harry Dennim over the hill—joinin' farm to us," he threw aside to Alex, "—well, he comes round a lot, an' there's somethin' about him I never could stomach though the women take to him. He's got more gall than a skunk has smell. He knows I'm a horse dealer that buys an' sells good animals, an' yet he's always treatin' me like I was sellin' mules. He'll come along when I've got a first-rate fancy horse, an' he'll say, says he, 'What do you want for this beast?' 'Why,' says I, 'that there horse ought to bring two hundred an' fifty.' 'Give you one hundred,' he'll say."

Bill spat profusely and looked toward the feedboxes along the wall.

"Might as well take a seat," he suggested. "Cheap sittin' as standin'."

When they were settled, he continued. "Yessir, that's the way he kep' on. 'What do you want for *this* horse?' he'd say. 'That'll bring a hundred-fifty,' I'd say. 'Give you seventy-five,' says he. Not jokin', mind you! But just nasty. Just talkin' down to me. Well, that thing has kep' up for years, till lately I jist decided I'd put a stop to it."

He looked toward the door anxiously as though fearful that the keen eyes of old Mrs. MacIntosh might be even here upon him, and lowered his voice still further.

"So, I didn't do a hell's haet all last week but ride over the county lookin' for this here horse. I'd heard of him now an' again, but he'd changed hands so often I had to keep huntin'. Found him at last down by Pleasant Unity, an' it took me three days to get him home."

Bill slapped his leg gleefully.

"He takes fallin' fits. 'Bout every four or five mile he has one. He looks like a fine horse, but he ain't worth"—Bill spoke solemnly now as one under oath—"he ain't worth ten dollars for phosphate."

A grin of understanding began to spread upon McKelvey's face.

"Well," Bill went on, "yesterday over comes young Dennim, cocky as a corkscrew. I seen him goin' up to the house so I get the beast out an' was busy curryin' him. He comes along after while an' says, 'What do you ask for *that* one?' 'Seventy-five dollars,' says I. 'I'll give you twenty-five,' he says. I just clapped him on the shoulder before he'd even time to spit, an' I says: 'Young man, *done!* You've bought a horse!'"

"What did he do?" McKelvey asked laughing.

"He didn't believe me at first but I says: 'I always knew some day you'd get the best of me, Harry. I always knew you'd wear me down till I jist *had* to meet your own price,' I says. 'That's the trouble,' I says, 'you jist wore me down. But mind I'm

standin' by my word. It's yours for twenty-five,' I says, 'since you're a neighbor an' all. You're jist too smart fur me. Took me off my guard,' I says. You could see he swallered the taffy whole, so he's bringin' the cash over today an' takin' the horse."

McKelvey chuckled. "Ever get the worst of a bargain, Bill?"

"Well, seems like I don't need no guardeen when it comes to horse tradin'. Along some other lines I mebbe ain't so good," he added ruefully.

McKelvey got to his feet abruptly. "Now, that's what we want to talk about. I'll have to be starting back soon, and I want to see if you and Alex here can't make some kind of a dicker that would benefit you both. Alex's fresh from Scotland, husky and ambitious and, if I'm any judge of character, a good fellow. You, Bill, as long as you stick to horse trading, can't run your farm right. Why not see what he can do here for a few months?"

Bill assumed an attitude of deep thought, stuck his thumbs in his galluses and teetered judicially back and forth on his heels. He stuck out his lower lip and slowly clucked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. After a few seconds of deliberation, he announced, "Might be a first-rate idea."

"But," McKelvey went on, "there is the little matter of wages that has to be considered. I know how you are usually fixed for ready cash, Bill. Trouble with you horse traders is that when you break even you think you've made a lot of money. Now here's my idea. You say you're getting twenty-five dollars today from this young Dennim?"

"As sure as there's an eye in a goat," said Bill. "You see he's tickled—"

"All right," Andy went on. "Now suppose you turn that over to Alex for his first month's pay. He'll be worth it to you. If he runs off I'll make it good. Then, later on, I've got another plan. What do you say?"

Bill looked crestfallen. "Well now, I'd planned on lookin' for a horse over beyond Greensburg next week. One there I fig-

gered I could get by swappin' yon sorrel mare an' givin' this twenty-five in cash for boot. But, fact is, I do need a little help about the farm—"

"That's right, Bill. Call it fixed. And now let's have a look round the place."

The April day, after moments of apparent indecision, had settled into an afternoon of steady warmth with a soft breeze blowing from the south. There was a difference, Alex's quick perception told him at once, between this brightness and that which fell upon the fields of his North Country. There, sunshine was a thing bounded by rains, intercepted by fogs, limited by low-lying clouds. It was a measured quantity. Men consciously enjoyed it when it was present but were inured to its absence.

Alex felt suddenly that this sunshine was prodigally given, unmeasured; that, strongly and relentlessly pressing its golden vigor upon the sons of the new world, it might be a source of power. At any rate he was at one with it now as he raised his face to its warmth. Not a cloud in the sky! Not a hint of storm from the sea. Ah, but there was no sea here. "I've left that far behind me," he thought, a bit wistfully.

They had crossed the cluttered barnyard, skirted the fresh-ploughed ground, and come to the sharp slope of a hill that reared itself surprisingly from a field. A soggy, rutted wagon track led, Alex noted, out to the main road. Before them was a strange dark opening in the hill, flanked and roofed by posts, and flooded with yellow mud.

"There 'tis," announced Bill cheerfully. "Lot of hard work gone for nothing. You can't do a haet with that coal bank now. No way to get the water out."

McKelvey said nothing, but strolled thoughtfully along by the base of the hill, now and then kicking up the black loam. At one spot, he paused and scraped vigorously with a sharp stone he had picked up, then signed to Alex. Bill was still pottering about the flooded coal bank.

"Look here, Alex," he said. "Right in there, if you were to dig

straight, you'd come on a rich vein of coal. Bill started his first bank in the worst place on the hill. Just like him! I'll bet a bank right here would work all right. No trouble with water. Bill knows how to build one, but he won't do it. If you would buckle to and do the work under his direction I think you could be selling coal to the farmers by next fall. What do you think?"

Alex stood still, eyeing thoughtfully the black loam before him. McKelvey watched him with a leap of affection for the strange lad, coupled with a twinge of envy. In the open sunlight Alex's face showed its full handsomeness and character: the broad brow, eager eyes, sensitive nostrils, mobile lips, chin like a rock. He stood now, feet apart, his hands shoved in his corduroy pockets, his cap slightly tilted on his blond hair. And McKelvey watching knew the bitterness of a childless old age.

Alex turned with the suddenness which always indicated a decision arrived at.

"I'm thinkin'," he said, "that, if I do all this work, I ought to get half the money for the coal when we sell it."

A quizzical look overspread McKelvey's face. The young Scotchman could take care of himself in a bargain, it seemed. Indeed, in this invisible partnership between them which had somehow formed itself in his mind, it might well happen that eventually the lad would be leading him. At any rate his present request was a fair one.

He summoned Bill, who after solemnly weighing the matter arrived, as always, at the decision of the majority.

"We won't bother to put it in writing," McKelvey said. "I'm a pretty good witness to this transaction. Besides I've got to be—"

A long clear call cut across the fields.

"Hoo . . . hoo! Hoo-oo . . . hoo!"

At the sound the three men turned at once in the direction of the barn. A girl was standing on the lower bar of the fence, holding to the upper board with one hand while with the other she waved a small brown box above her head.

Parkinson's weather-beaten face became transformed with a look of half-shamed delight. McKelvey's, too, softened as he looked. Neither expression was lost to Alex, who glanced from the men beside him to the figure on the fence. He knew at once that this was the owner of the blue hood. As they made their way quickly back toward her, McKelvey setting the pace, he could see her clearly clinging to the rail. To his startled eyes she seemed to be the living symbol of the new world brightness at which he had just been marveling. For the dark bonnet she was wearing had dropped back upon her shoulders and her hair was golden. Never a girl had he seen in Scotland with hair like this, the color of ripe wheat! And her face, rosy now and laughing as the men approached, was full of light as though an inner and an outer radiance met upon it.

"Uncle Andy," she was saying, "here I've missed you again—almost. Why do you always come when I'm away?"

For answer McKelvey lifted her down in his arms—she was a slight thing—and kissed her, saying as he did so: "This is one of the few compensations for being sixty, Meggy dear. How's the schoolmarm?"

"Tell him the news, Father. It sounds proud for me to say it!"

Parkinson's face beamed. "Why, durned if the directors didn't call on her yesterday at the schoolhouse an' sign her up for next year. Ain't that a feather in her cap?"

"Great!" said McKelvey. "Fine! And it's supposed to be a tough school at that. How do you keep the big boys in order, Meggy?"

The girl laughed. And again it seemed to Alex as though all the peculiar brilliancy of the day centered in her.

"Oh, I just thrash them," she said airily.

McKelvey suddenly turned to Alex.

"I almost forgot you," he said. "This is Miss Parkinson. I guess she'll let you call her Meggy. And Meggy, this is Alex MacTay, the new hired hand. Blame me for bringing him if you don't like him."

For the first time the girl's eyes rested full upon Alex. And as he met the beauty of the gaze the blood of his body seemed to freeze and then burn. He knew now why he had never loved a girl in Scotland, or even deeply desired one. He knew why, years ago, in the quiet of Tibbie's Glen he had set himself irrevocably to come to America; he knew now why all in a moment he had cast away his plan of working in Philadelphia, and why he had swiftly decided that morning to come to the Parkinson farm!

But because this knowledge had come to him overwhelmingly along with a pounding of his heart, he could not speak. Neither did Meggy. She stared into the intensity of his blue eyes and then dropped her own in confusion. She caught up the little brown lunch box and started toward the house.

"My goodness!" she called over her shoulder. "I've got to help Mother. Will you stay for supper, Uncle Andy?"

"Can't, Meggy. But I'll take a cup of tea before I start."

The girl ran lightly up the walk, with Shep, the collie, bounding beside her.

When the door had closed upon her, McKelvey drew Alex aside. His face was grave and his eyes keen, as though a new anxiety had crossed his mind.

"Alex," he said, "you're an utter stranger to me. I only know that instinctively I like you and feel you've good stuff in you. On the strength of that I've brought you to the home of my good friends. I want you to prove that my confidence isn't misplaced."

"I will, sir," said Alex firmly, and McKelvey was again satisfied.

By eight o'clock that night several things had happened. McKelvey, of course, had gone. He had driven off around the turn of the road, smiling to himself, for Alex had found a hammer and nails in the woodshed and was at the moment mending the barnyard fence.

During the evening meal, Bill had risen from the table sud-

denly and left the kitchen. There had been sounds of voices at the end of the walk, the sharp neigh of a horse, and a loud burst of laughter which caused the womenfolks to look up, saying in a breath, "Why, there's Harry!" Alex, saying nothing but watching carefully, saw Meggy's color rise at the name.

"Why don't Bill bring him on in to supper?" Mrs. MacIntosh asked irritably.

But though Mrs. Parkinson went to the door to call out to the men, they were not to be seen. Twenty minutes later Bill returned to the kitchen, a great smugness upon his countenance. He coughed ostentatiously several times and tried to catch Alex's eye. When the women questioned him he reported blandly that he had just sold the bay horse to Harry Dennim.

"Why, I didn't even know he was lookin' at the beast," Mrs. MacIntosh exclaimed.

"Oh, didn't you?" said Bill. "Well, he jist kinda took a fancy to this one, an' I let it go cheap seein' it was Harry."

"What'd he pay you for it?" she pursued.

"Oh, a fair price. Nothin' extry," Bill returned, overlaying his large slice of bread richly with apple butter.

It was later, when the dishes were cleared away and Mrs. MacIntosh was calling for "the Book," that Meggy, passing close by her father, said in an anxious voice, "You're not up to any tricks with Harry, are you, Father?"

For the first time Bill looked slightly discomfited.

"Now how could I be?" he said. "I give him the horse at his own price, fair as fiddlin'."

The ceremony of family prayers was conducted by Mrs. MacIntosh with her son-in-law in the farthest corner of the kitchen. For while Bill had been nursed upon Calvinism and could argue eloquently upon *Limited Atonement* and the general status of the elect, he had never in the phraseology of New Salem made his "profession," and took no part in religious activities except an extremely moderate attendance upon divine services. Tirzah his wife had long since given up urging him to unite

with the church. But she knelt each night, with a quilt thrown over her muslin nightgown, and prayed with all the fervor of her deep and quiet nature that Bill by some special miracle of grace might not be lost. For she, and she alone, knew certain things about his character which, if God were only a woman, would insure Bill's entrance through the pearly gates.

Mrs. MacIntosh now hitched her chair nearer the light and, after peering sharply over her glasses to see that all the family were in proper attitudes, began upon the reading. Alex sat in his corner, strangely becalmed after all the events of the day. The rise and fall of the old woman's voice with its familiar accent was music to him. He liked Mrs. Parkinson with her kindly serenity. He liked Bill. He did not trust himself then to look across at Meggy. Later as he knelt, a rush of warm air from the open window blew over him, sweet with the smell of pear blossoms, and vocal with a thin piping chorus. He turned carefully now and looked at Meggy kneeling beside her chair. Her face was hidden, but the golden hair was visible and the delicate outline of her young body. He watched her till his own face grew hot, then covered it with his hands.

When they rose at last Alex spoke curiously. "What's them birds you can hear out there?"

"Birds?" they all questioned at once.

"Aye. You can hear them pipin'. It's funny, birds singin' at night."

They all quieted to listen and then Meggy broke into a peal of laughter.

"It's the frogs," she cried between gasps. "It's the young frogs! Oh, my goodness, he called them *birds*!"

Even when the general amusement had subsided Meggy still broke out in irrepressible giggles, until she heard Alex say somewhat stiffly: "Well, I guess I'll haud away to bed now. I'll be sayin' good night to ye."

She followed him then to the foot of the back stairway. The others were talking in the far corner of the kitchen by the stove.

She had not allowed herself to meet his eyes since that first long moment. She raised hers now a little fearfully.

"I wasn't making fun of you," she said gently, "about the frogs."

"Aye," said Alex. "That's all right. Gie me a little time, an' I'll be learnin' American ways."

She held out her hand slowly.

"Good night—Alex."

He held it tightly for a second in his own.

"Good night—Meggy."

In his small room at the top of the stairs, where he had earlier placed his chest, he undressed quickly, sleeping in the shirt he wore. He stretched his long legs upon the feather tick. His body relaxed. The emptiness, the uncertainty, the disappointment of the morning had left him. He felt now no qualms of homesickness. The air he breathed with its strange sounds and scents was American air, and had in a few hours' time grown pleasant to his senses. For a moment he thought of trying to put the spring magic of it into rhyme, as he would have done at home. But he brushed the idea aside as though it were weakness.

"There's no time here for verse-makin'. That's all behind me now!"

He turned his face toward the window that he might better hear the weird, delicate sweetness of the young frogs' chorus. "I wasn't making fun of you," she had said, "about the frogs."

He closed his eyes, knowing that this would be the first night since he had left Scotland that he would not be dreaming of Lamson Green.

CHAPTER II

By the time May had swept the countryside Alex had mended the fences, put new hinges on the sagging doors, and cleared up the littered barnyard. Mrs. MacIntosh, hobbling to the front parlor window to look down upon the miracle, nodded her stern white head in approval.

"For the first time since your father died," she told Tirzah, "this farm looks as if somebody owned it. Why couldn't Bill have done all this? Ach, but you might as well go to the devil for a dishclout as go to Bill for an honest day's work."

Though Tirzah as usual said little, she too was pleased with the newcomer. In quiet ways she mothered him, darning his socks and sewing buttons on his shirts. During the long procession of hired men who had come and gone in her married life, her orderly, industrious soul had suffered seeing each in turn fall in with Bill's slack ways and end by becoming surly or discontented. Here was a young man who seemed as though he could keep Bill—in so far as that was possible—up to his own standard. This quality of Alex's was even now apparent in that he had somehow cajoled Bill into finishing the ploughing before he started off to look for another horse.

Alex himself was working harder than he had ever done in his life. For he was determined first of all to justify himself in McKelvey's eyes. On a bit of paper in his room he wrote down one night an outline of his aspirations for the years to come. He kept this in the bottom of his chest between the leaves of the Bible his mother had packed there. These were the notations:

1st year—Get Parkinson farm in order and open coal bank. Learn American ways.

2nd year—Get into some real business where there will be a chance to get on—the coal seems the likeliest.

3rd year—M.

4th year—Keep working up. Get nearer the top. Keep gathering gear.

He did not write beyond this, and the M. remained only an initial on the paper, though he always whispered the word "marriage" to himself as he read over his outline. But the mere sight of the letter as the symbol of the third year served as discipline to the tumult of Alex's young heart. He had meant it to be so when he wrote it. *The third year!* It took all the strength of him to allow the M. to stand there instead of in the second. For daily now the golden beauty of Meggy sent his blood hotly through his veins as if it were an army with banners. With the quick fearless grasp of facts which was part of his nature he put up no pretense against the strange force that had laid hold on him. This was love. It could be nothing else. He had wondered sometimes back in the Glen what the feel of it would be like. He knew now. He knew in the mornings when Meggy, fresh from sleep, smiled shyly at him, across the breakfast table; he knew as he furtively watched her churning on the back porch, the sleeves of her dress rolled high, showing the dimples in her elbows. And he knew most of all when she laughed with her head tilted joyously like a bird in the sun.

But because of this he kept his own eyes guarded, avoided any minutes alone with her, and dug so furiously into the work of the farm that at night he fell asleep exhausted when he touched his pillow.

He had been there two weeks before he wrote to Lamson Green. Even then it was Tirzah who mentioned it.

"You've sent word to your mother, have you, Alex?" she asked one day. "I doubt she'll be worried till she hears where you are."

"I'll do it the night," Alex had responded, startled and ashamed that he had neglected this duty. But as he sat in his room writing on the edge of the old washstand which served also as dresser and table, while the early moths and chafers fluttered in through the open window to beat with soft futility against the lamp chimney, he had a far-away feeling of the spirit when he thought of Lamson Green. Even his mother seemed unreal. He wrote, not the details he knew she would wish to hear, but brief generalities such as had always made up the letters of Tom and Bertie and Jock.

... I had a pretty rough crossing but got along all right. I didn't bide in Philadelphia as I'd thought. One of my cabin mates was coming out to the back end of the state of Pennsylvania and I come with him. I've got a place here on a farm with Scotch people, name of Parkinson. I'll bide awhile anyhow and see what casts up. My address is New Salem, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. I like America fine. There's more sunshine and plenty woodland. Let me be hearing from you when you can drop us a line. I trust this finds you all well as it leaves me at the present. I'll tell you more in my next letter.

Your son,

ALEX

P.S. Tell Mr. Whinnery I'll be writing him soon.

A feeling of guilt clung to him as he thought of Marget his mother poring over this missive in search of all that lay between the lines. But there was a reason why details were hard to write. All his surroundings at the farm, and all his plans for the future were now suddenly but inextricably bound up with his new love. And that must be buried beyond all discovery.

One May morning when the rich smell of the ploughed earth blended with the last fruit blossoms, when cobwebs clung like patterned breath to all the bushes, and the sunshine, upon which Alex was growing more and more to depend, shone warmly down, Bill and Meggy and Alex left the kitchen after an early breakfast with a great deal of laughing on the part of

Meggy and some last instructions from Mrs. MacIntosh. The men were going to plant corn, and Meggy had begged leave to drop the pumpkin seeds as she had done ever since she was a child.

"What'll you do if some of your school directors come ridin' past an' see you trottin' along the corn rows like a cutty? It'll no' look dignified," Mrs. MacIntosh had adjured her granddaughter with what little severity she could muster, for the old lady's tones always softened, Alex had noticed, when the girl was near.

"Oh, I don't have to be dignified again for four whole months, Granny! That's the beauty of it. Where are the punkin seeds? My goodness! This whole bagful? I can plant the field! Do you like punkin pie, Alex?" she asked, turning to him.

"I never tasted any," he said, embarrassed by her sudden question.

Meggy's eyes grew round in astonishment. "You never tasted punkin pie! Why not?"

"Well," said Alex, determined to be out with the worst, "I never seen a punkin. We don't grow them in Scotland."

"My goodness!" Meggy's amazement sat prettily upon her. "Are things here really so different?"

Alex allowed himself one moment in which he looked full in her eager face framed by the golden braids.

"Some things," he said briefly.

"Aye, aye," came from Mrs. MacIntosh. "That's right about the punkins an' the corn too. I've been so long over, I just forget to mention it. Now mind, Meggy, keep your sunbonnet tied on you, an' don't come in tanned like an Injun. Get along now, an' let's see how much you'll get done before night!"

Alex was keenly interested in the corn planting. The grain itself was new to him, though he had read of it, of course. The day before, under Bill's fluent supervision, he had taken the light plough and a steady horse and marked out the field in crisscross furrows three feet apart. Now at each intersection Bill

let fall four grains of corn from the bag he carried slung over one shoulder. Meggy, following, dropped one pumpkin seed in every third spot. Behind them Alex with a hoe carefully covered the grains as he had been bidden, making a neat little mound of earth over each hill.

Bill at his not too arduous task had plenty of breath for conversation. After several trips across the field and back, he began to chuckle.

"This here droppin' just happens to make me think of old Cyrus Towner. He had the dropsy—"

"Now, Father," Meggy said quickly, "that's a dreadful story."

"Why, what's wrong with it? It's true, ain't it? These here Towners lived near us when I was a boy. Funny folks! Durned if they wasn't! Well old Towner he took the dropsy an' died of it. None of them never darkened a church door, but when the old man kicked the bucket Amos, the oldest boy, thought he'd ought to get a preacher to bury his Pap so he went to New Salem an' hunted up Reverend Rayburn. An' the Reverend he was always awful solemn an' polite, an' he says—"

"Father," Meggy broke in again, "I hate to hear you tell this."

Bill looked over his shoulder at her in mild surprise. "Why, we got to have somethin' to take our minds off our work, Meggy. Nothin' wrong with this story as fur as I can see. The Reverend he just says, 'An', my poor boy, what did your father die of?' An' Amos winks an' says: 'Well, Parson, tell you how it was. 'Bout a week ago they tapped Pap,' he says, 'an' nothin' lasts in our house more'n a week after it's tapped!'"

Bill stopped to laugh boisterously, and Alex straightened his back in relief to join him. As he did so he caught sight of a young man coming toward them across the fields. Alex at his first glance saw that the stranger seemed slightly older than himself, a dark, handsome fellow with a mustache. Meggy had caught sight of him now and gave a little cry.

"Oh, there's Harry," she said nervously.

Bill's face was a careful mask as the young man approached.

He had frequently discussed the sale of the bay horse with Alex. His satisfaction over his triumph was tinged with a faint uneasiness as days and then weeks passed with no sign from Harry. "It ain't like him to take that layin' down," Bill had remarked often. "I can't figger him out. Anyway, I've got the cash an' he's got the horse, durn him!"

But Alex knew that the pleasure of the transaction for Bill had been considerably bedimmed when he had had no chance to laugh in his victim's face.

Now young Dennim was coming toward them with long strides, smiling as he came. He was not in working clothes, and his dark suit sat well upon him. As he watched, Alex was aware that his own hair needed cutting, that his face was unshaven, and that his clothes looked "old country" and different.

Dennim was within speaking distance now, so Bill called a casual "Hi, Harry!"

"H'are you, Mr. Parkinson? Hello, Meggy."

His eyes and Alex's then met squarely, and in the second Alex knew him for an enemy.

"And who's this?" Dennim asked with the suspicion of a sneer in his voice.

"Oh," said Bill, eager apparently for a conversational opening, "that's right, you hain't been over since Alex's come. Why, this is our new hand, MacTay. An' this here's Harry Dennim, Alex. You might have heard me mention him."

The two young men merely nodded to each other, and then Meggy spoke.

"Are you going to Greensburg, Harry? You're all dressed up."

"Why, yes," he answered with the slow smile Alex found particularly obnoxious. "I've got a few little errands I have to 'tend to. I just stopped by to tell your Pap about the luck I've had with the bay horse."

"Luck!" burst from Bill before he could stop himself.

"Yes," Harry went on, eyeing Bill mockingly. "A man was at our house yesterday from up near Delmont, Tom Miller. I guess

you know him. An' he liked the look of the bay. I told him it was one of your beasts, an' I says: 'You know the kind of horses Parkinson handles. If anything is wrong with this one, I says, we'll just go back on Parkinson, for he sold me this for a fine horse!' Well, Miller said he'd known about you for a long time an' that was the only recommend he needed. He paid me sixty dollars for the beast an' left yesterday afternoon. Seems he was just wantin' a buggy horse. It sure was a nice transaction for me, now."

Bill's face was actually white beneath the grubby beard. He swallowed hard, but when he spoke, Alex knew with admiration and relief that young Dennim was not going to be allowed to retire as complete master of the situation. Bill's voice had just the proper note of age condescending to the vagaries of youth.

"So you sold the bay?" he echoed as though greatly surprised at the thought. "Well now, once you get holt of a nice bargain like that you ought to hang on to it. If you hadn't of just took me off my guard I might of got sixty for the horse myself. Cheap at the price, too! Yes, sir! That's right!"

It was young Dennim's turn to look amazed. He stared at Bill incredulously and then apparently with an effort pulled himself together.

"Could I speak to you a minute, Meggy, private?" he asked.

Meggy blushed prettily and moved toward him. They walked farther away and talked in low voices. Alex's heart beat hard, for out of the tail of his eye he could see Meggy's face raised brightly to Dennim's. She nodded her head, as though promising something, then with a little laugh ran back to her work; and Dennim walked quickly to the barnyard, loosed his horse, and rode off down the road. He looked over once, and Meggy waved to him.

Bill turned to his daughter.

"What's he wantin' now?"

"Oh, he just invited me to go in to New Salem to a lecture tonight."

"And you're goin', I s'pose?"

"Why, of course! It'll be a nice drive, and I like lectures. What's wrong? Why wouldn't I go? You act sometimes as if you didn't like Harry!"

"Now what would ever make you think that?" Bill said irritably, and went on planting corn.

But they worked now in silence. Bill looked glum and perturbed; Meggy seemed lost in her own pleasant fancies, and Alex was wrestling with a bitter futility. Just this morning of seeing Meggy moving before him, hearing her voice and her laugh, had filled him with intolerable longing. And what could he do at this point against the handsome assurance and power of Harry Dennim? Bill had given him all the facts relative to the Dennims. Their farm was a large one, richly underlaid with coal. Harry was sole master now that his father was dead. He and his mother lived in the big brick house over the hill with a hired man and a hired girl also. As Bill put it, they were "highly-tighty" folks, and Harry's one year at college had gone to his head. One other fact was mercilessly clear to Alex. "Young Dennim's sweet on Meggy, an' she's actin' pleased about it," he thought savagely to himself.

At noon Meggy announced that she had had enough field work for one day, and Bill himself complained hopefully of a headache at dinner. Furthermore he just remembered an important errand to be done in New Salem. But Alex played the taskmaster.

"We can finish the field the day if we keep at it, Mr. Parkinson. It's not such a big one. I think we'd better stay by it till it's done," he insisted quietly.

Still muttering of urgent business elsewhere, Bill finally went back to work. By sunset the big field lay in neatly planted hills.

When the men came in to supper, they found the womenfolk in earnest conclave.

"But after all," Meggy was begging, "it's May, and there will be lots of girls there in white dresses, I know."

"Cast not a clout till May be out," quoted Mrs. MacIntosh. "You know you'll have to be doin' that if you wear your white."

"I think, Meggy," said Tirzah in her calm way, "that your blue challis is the best. The color's pretty at night an' you'll be none too warm with it in the Hall. They'll have the windows open."

"Maybe so," Meggy agreed reluctantly.

"An' you'd better get all dressed afore your supper," said Mrs. MacIntosh. "Harry's one of these early ones."

So it happened that Alex had to look across the table at a new Meggy whom he had never seen before. Even on Sundays her clothing had been dark. Now tonight her dress was the color of a flax flower, fitted tightly in a basque around the slim waist and over the little breasts, with a soft white ruching at the neck. It gave her an indescribable elegance and grace as though a young princess had suddenly appeared in the plain farm kitchen. Alex gave up trying to keep his eyes downcast. For the first time in his life he was deliberately doing what his reason forbade. So he watched her, leaving the fried ham half eaten on his plate, and the sassafras tea grew cold in the cup.

There was the crown of gold which was her hair, and which still to him as on that first day seemed the sunshine of the new world objectified; there was the smooth brow patterned from Tirzah's and curiously expressive in itself of a deep inner serenity; there was the nose, faintly tilted, and the mouth, generous like Bill's, red-lipped and sweet. This was Meggy, and he loved her, God help him.

They were just finishing their apple pie when a step sounded on the back steps and Harry Dennim appeared in the door. Alex could tell that both Tirzah and Mrs. MacIntosh were impressed by his handsome manner.

"Good evening, all," he began airily. "How are you, Mrs. Parkinson? Well, Mrs. MacIntosh, you look younger every time I see you!"

The old lady fluttered her thin hands.

"Tut, tut, Harry! You've always a lick of the Blarney stone on your tongue, haven't you? How's your mother?"

"Oh, about her usual. She's been doing a little in the garden today. She don't have to," he added hastily, "but she just thinks nobody can do it to please her."

Meggy had run off to get her coat, and Bill had slid out the back door, unnoticed by all except Alex. The women plied Harry with interested questions as he sat in the rocker smoothing his dark mustache. Alex noted now that his forehead was low beneath the black hair.

"An' what's the entertainment to be the night, Harry?" Mrs. MacIntosh inquired.

"It's by a man that's been to China or somewhere. I forget the country. But he's lecturin' on his travels—an' showin' pictures too, they tell me."

"Oh, aye. A steeription lantern he'll have, I doubt. That'll be grand. Here's Meggy. Well now, see you don't let the horse run away wi' you, an' mind you bring us home the news!"

They went out the door, Meggy turning to wave and call good-bye. Alex could see Harry assist her into the stylish buggy, then untie the horse and start off with a flourish. The sound of hoofs and wheels came back on the air for several minutes, and then everything was quiet. Alex went out to the back porch and sat down. A black desolation was upon him, darker than that he had felt upon the docks at Philadelphia. The sweetness of the May evening made it the more intolerable. He could sense, as clearly as though he rode beside them, the forms of Meggy and her lover in the smart buggy driving along the country roads. Harry would be close to her, their shoulders touching; he would be looking into her face, and she would be smiling back at him as on that morning in the cornfield. Over and around them would be the fragrance of the wild honeysuckle and the elderberry blooms. Coming home—close to each other once more—through the darkness of the night, what would they be saying? It was anguish to think of it.

Suddenly Alex rose and shook himself as though to slough off the ache and weariness of the day's work from his limbs. There was no time to sit and brood. The deep, untapped wells of power within him were stirring.

"I've got to get on!" he adjured himself roughly. "I can't be plantin' corn all my life. There's no an hour to be wasted."

He went quickly down the walk and on to the barn, where Bill sat, also disconsolate, on his favorite seat on a feedbox.

"No, sir," Bill said at once, as though Alex were already apprised of his train of thought, "I can't let the thing lay like it is. I got my reputation to think of. I'm known all over the County and funder for sellin' good horses. Goldurn that Harry Dennim fur a sneakin', lyin' skunk. I might have knowed he was up to somethin'."

With an effort Alex brought his mind to bear on Bill's problem.

"Will you do anything?" he asked.

"It'll cost me money," Bill groaned, "the way I'd like to fix it up."

"How's that again?"

"I'd like to find a good first-class horse that looks like the bay. Then I'd take it up to Delmont an' tell this here Tom Miller the whole story an' offer to switch horses with mebbe some boot from him. Then I'd sneak that old fallin'-fits back here an' shoot him nice an' decent behind the barn an' call the deal closed. Tom Miller would never tell, an' the upshot would be that Harry would be scratchin' his head the rest of his life wonderin', an' my reputation would be good as ever."

Alex nodded slowly as he took in all the implications of the plan.

"It's a good idea. How much money would you be needin'?"

Bill eyed him narrowly, as the question took on significance.

"Well, twenty-five dollars in cash would just about see me through. You see I can trade in this sorrel mare here. Seems like I seen a good bay with a white splotch on his nose over beyont

Blairsville last summer at Sid Rankin's place . . . I could start right off tomorrow huntin' if I just had a little ready money—"

Alex considered. The twenty-five dollars, derived from the original sale of the bay to Harry, had been reluctantly turned over to him by Bill, as McKelvey had arranged. He had earned it twice over during these weeks, he knew well. And yet— A strong hatred rose in him that his enemies were to know and fear in later years. He remembered the look in Harry Dennim's eyes as he spoke to Meggy.

"I'll gie ye the twenty-five!" The force and suddenness with which the words were spoken made Bill jump. Then he got down from the feedbox, grinning with pleasure, ready to go over his plan again with added details.

But Alex cut him off. "You can be payin' me back later. An' now, Mr. Parkinson, will you come out wi' me to the old coal bank?"

"Coal bank!" Bill echoed, surprised. "At this time of day?"

"Aye. If we hurry we can look it over afore the mirk settles down. I canna get used to these short evenin's," he added.

Bill shook his head dubiously. Was there, he wondered uneasily, no stopping this young giant even after a day of corn planting?

"You ought to rest yourself, Alex. What's the sense of rushin' things like this? That there coal bank'll look just the same tomorrow mornin'."

"We've got to get started on the new one, Mr. Parkinson. Between now an' the time to hoe the young corn I can mebbe get a muckle done at it. I'll do the work if you'll just tell me how to go about it."

Bill, relieved and flattered by the division of labor, began to show some interest.

They crossed the fields and came to the foot of the hill. Carefully prospecting, Alex found the spot McKelvey had indicated. Bill readily agreed that this was the ideal location for the new bank. Then, in a round voice of authority, he described

the first steps. There must be locust posts cut from a distant grove on the farm. Then with pick and shovel the outer coating of the hill here must be stripped away for the entry. He explained how the first side posts were placed, then the cross timbers.

"You jist keep workin' in, settin' your posts an' timbers as you go till you get to the solid roof. Then you've got better than dirt to dig out. If you'll do the diggin' I can mebbe come out evenin's an' advise you. If I do say it I know as much about the way a coal bank ought to be dug as anybody. Only course jist now I got a good deal on my hands—"

"Aye," agreed Alex. "If we can get this goin' by the autumn do you think we can get buyers?"

"Gosh, yes!" said Bill. "If the water don't drown us out. You know, Alex," he added, "there's more money to be made in coal than in either farmin' or horse tradin'—that is, if you hit it right."

"That's just what I'm thinkin'," Alex replied.

When they got back to the house Alex sat down on the back porch steps and took off his shoes. His suspicions were confirmed. The thin spot in one sole had become a hole after the day's corn planting. He carried them into the kitchen, treading softly in his thick wool socks which Marget had knitted him.

"I'm afraid I'm needin' a cobbler," he said ruefully.

Mrs. MacIntosh looked up from her paper, and over her glasses.

"Aye, that ye are. Well, it's better to wear out shoon than sheets, as the sayin' goes."

"I'll take you in to New Salem tomorrow," Bill said with alacrity. "I got an errand there. Come to think of it, you hain't been off the place since you come."

Alex considered. "If it's just the same, I believe I'd rather go to Greensburg an' have a crack wi' Mr. McKelvey. I could drive in mysel' if you'd lend me a horse."

"Oh, I'll take you," Bill said eagerly. "We'll get a good early

start in the mornin'. I got a few errands I ought to tend to—"

"You an' your errands!" Mrs. MacIntosh snapped. "Anythin' to take you away from your work. I believe if you heard of someone goin' to the Bad Place you'd say you had an errand there yourself!"

"Might at that," Bill replied, unperturbed. "Accordin' to the preachers I ought to have a lot of friends down there by this time."

"Shame on ye, Bill Parkinson. It'll be a wonder if the Lord don't smite you for such loose talk. I never seen a man so . . ."

Alex did not wait. He had discovered already that these conversations between Bill and his mother-in-law were lengthy. Bill's unruffled calm in the midst of all the old lady's pointed accusations drove her to a frenzy.

Alex climbed the stairs, his shoes in his hand, and quickly prepared for bed. With a determined wrench of the will, he tore his thoughts from Meggy and Dennim while he considered the problem of the new coal bank.

"That's the place for me to start," he kept saying to himself until he fell asleep.

The next morning he carried the shaving mug from his washstand down to the kitchen for warm water, then before a small mirror in his room carefully removed his beard leaving a young but promising blond mustache. He wore his best shirt and the clothes in which he had arrived. Even so the contrast between them and the outfit of Harry Dennim was obvious. Alex stood thinking for several minutes; then with a quick decision he felt in the bottom of his chest for a gray wool sock. In the toe was all the money he had in the world: the twenty-five dollars received from Bill, and the thirty he had left after paying his fare to Greensburg. The first roll he took out at once and shoved into his pocket. If it could be used to take some of the conceit out of Harry Dennim, it would be well spent. And if the coal-bank plan was successful he'd get it back some day. The other bills which had been pounds when he left Scotland,

he fingered thoughtfully. They represented the careful savings of years. A few shillings from Peter Whinnery for helping him at the sheep washing each spring. A pound for a summer's work on his uncle's farm near Lamson. All his native instinct told him to save this precious hoard as a hostage against the future. But a peremptory impulse swept the other thoughts aside.

"I can't be goin' about like a gawk," he muttered.

And even as he spoke the words a clear vision came to him of himself in a suit like Harry Dennim's riding off beside Meggy in the buggy.

He counted twenty dollars from the bills and put them in his purse. Then he pushed the two remaining fives into the toe of the gray sock. It hung accusingly limp, but Alex thrust it hastily back into the chest!

"A man's got to take some chances if he's goin' to get on," he said roughly, and went on down to breakfast.

It was a quiet meal, for Meggy was still abed after her late evening, and old Mrs. MacIntosh was dozing in her rocking chair.

"She won't ever close an eye as long as Meggy's out," Tirzah explained in a low voice, "and then she insists on getting up as usual in the morning. So I always just let her sleep in her chair as long as she will."

"What time did Meggy get in?" Bill asked.

"About one o'clock."

"He must have drove home the longest way round."

"Well, they went to the ice-cream parlor after the lecture. Meggy said it was crowded, too. They had to wait for a table, and then Harry insisted that she'd have a second dish. Meggy said she had a fine time. She come in to tell me last night when she got back."

"Oh, I heard the two of you whisperin', but I didn't know what time it was. Well, Alex, I guess we'd better be gettin' on our way." He glanced cautiously toward the rocking chair and then said: "I think mebbe I'll let you take the rig an' drive in

to town yourself. I got a little errand out beyont Blairsville, an' I think I'll just tend to it today. I'll ride that sorrel mare."

"Now, Bill," Tirzah said anxiously, "I thought mebbe you'd given up tradin' for a while!"

"That's all right, Mother. This here's a good piece of business. Alex thinks so too, don't you?"

Alex flushed but nodded his head.

"I do, that," he said.

Tirzah looked relieved. "Well, just so you're not wasting your time swappin' horses—an' be careful, both of you, on your travels."

At the barn, Alex turned over the twenty-five to Bill, who pocketed it with a large gesture of affluence. In a few minutes they were off, Alex carefully driving a gray mare and Bill mounted upon the sorrel. At the point where the back road came out upon the main one, Bill rode close to the buggy.

"Here's where we part company, as the man said when his suspenders busted. Now just keep straight on the road that's most traveled an' you'll be all right. You can tell Andy about the horse business. Well, so long, Alex."

He turned to the left, and Alex to the right. The day was perfect. Alex had begun now to trust the amazing beneficence of the weather. The remembrance of the inevitable Scottish rains and mists was already becoming dim in his mind. Through all his body he felt the stimulus of the new world's sun. As he drove on now, up hill and down, sitting very straight in the buggy, handling the reins with pride, he wished the folks at home could see him—his mother and father, Lizzie and Mr. Whinnery—riding along here like a gentleman! And him only six weeks over!

When at last he reached the Fair grounds and saw the county seat rising before him, he gave the horse a light cut with the whip and entered the town with what seemed to him a grand flourish. He drove to the livery stable, which he remembered, and left the horse, then put the worn shoes, which Tirzah had

carefully wrapped up for him, under his arm and slowly, as a man returning affectionately to former scenes, strolled along the streets. He took a look at the station and the little restaurant where he had first tasted coffee. He smiled as he thought of his dejection on that day. Now after six short weeks America had become home to him. It was not only the strength of his love for Meggy that held him to it, it was the strange magic by which the young country binds her adopted sons quickly to herself.

Having reached the brick office building, he paused at the foot of the stairway that led to McKelvey's chambers, thinking again of himself and Pat as they had nervously communed with each other on that other morning about the stranger they had been sent to seek. Now, Alex realized how much this man had come to mean to him. It was McKelvey's praise that mattered, his advice that he craved. He hurried up the stairs, preparing himself for disappointment, but at his knock the familiar nasal voice called, "Come in."

Everything was the same: the desk littered with papers, the silk hat standing on its crown, the brass spittoon in the foreground. McKelvey finished a line without looking up, but when he did he gave an ejaculation of surprise and sprang to his feet.

"Well, well, Alex! Upon my word. Where did you hail from? Why, my lad, I'm glad to see you!"

"And I'm certainly pleased to see you, sir. I had a bit of cobbling to be done, so Mr. Parkinson lent me a rig to drive in. He's off to Blairsville or thereabouts lookin' for a horse."

"I'll bet you! Well, how are things going?"

Alex gave him an account of his work during the weeks. McKelvey's eyes narrowed with pleasure at the clear, logical recital. He asked questions frequently, and at the end said: "Good! A fine beginning, my lad. And now, what?"

"The coal bank, sir. I've got things in shape where I can start. I'll do some on it evenings and whenever I can spare a day. I'd like next winter to be sellin' the coal an' get a little

money past me. For I'm not plannin' to stay too long on the farm, sir."

McKelvey rubbed his nose. "All right," he said. "We'll keep our eyes open and see which way the cat jumps. Meanwhile how about some dinner? I always eat early. Come down to the hotel with me, and we'll talk while we eat."

Alex hesitated. "I'd like to, fine, but I've got to get shut of a little business. There's the cobbler first, an' then—" He hesitated, flushing a little. "I thought I'd be gettin' some American clothes. You see these are my Sabbath breeks I've got on, an' they're no' just like the ones they're wearing here."

McKelvey's wise eyes studied the young man before him. And as he watched him he knew that he loved him.

"What happened about the bay horse?" he asked with apparent irrelevance.

Alex told him briefly.

"So this young Dennim," McKelvey said, "has sort of twisted the tables on Bill, eh?"

"But he won't when we're finished with him!" Alex's blue eyes flashed, and his chin was set.

"You don't care much for Dennim, either, I take it."

"I do not, sir."

"But he's a stylish dresser?"

Alex caught the implication, but he gave no sign of it.

"Aye. He is that."

McKelvey rose, picked up the silk hat, and brushed the crown against his sleeve before setting it on the back of his head.

"*Vestis virum facit*—the coat makes the man," he pronounced slowly. "And that goes also, I would say, for the pants. Do you know, Alex, I lost my first case because I was too poor to buy myself a decent suit of clothes. That's right! There I stood, six foot two, thin as a rail, homely as they come, I suppose, with my britches nearly worn through and my arms dangling out of my sleeves. Somebody on the jury tittered, and that finished me."

McKelvey's face darkened with the pain of that memory.

"Ever since then," he went on, "I've had a wholesome respect for mankind's outer covering. We'll eat our dinner, and then I'll take you to the clothing store. I suspect our tastes may run about the same. 'Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy, but not express'd in fancy; rich but not gaudy.' Eh, Alex?"

"Aye. That's about the size of it, sir."

Then, as though bound suddenly by new ties they looked into each other's eyes and laughed, as they started down the stairs.

At two o'clock Alex stood on the second floor of Dorwin's dry-goods store before a tall mirror. In spite of its blank spots here and there, he could see himself quite clearly as a new man. He wore a gray suit, the coat fastened high by the top button, the rest hanging modishly open, revealing the neat-fitting vest. The trousers (of an incredible length) of course matched. He wore a new white shirt and collar with a smart red bow tie. Below the long trouser legs appeared Alex's chief pride: a pair of American shoes, soft of leather and elegant in design. These latter had been urged by McKelvey as an essential part of the costume.

"Those you're wearing, Alex, are strong enough for working shoes. Get your old ones cobbled, and keep two pairs for the fields. These new ones you need for dress-up."

And so he stood arrayed with McKelvey seated upon a chair close by, his silk hat on his knees and his arms folded, watching intently while the salesman talked with more and more assurance.

"A well set-up young chap, Mr. McKelvey! And a splendid suit. Very latest cut and good material. I must say it becomes him something wonderful."

And it did. McKelvey's eyes were deep as he watched. While the tight-fitting brown jacket and corduroys of Scottish origin had revealed a tall, husky youth, fresh of color and blond of hair, the new gray suit showed a powerfully built and handsome

young man who seemed immediately at ease in his new raiment.

"Aye," said Alex, turning suddenly from the mirror, "these'll do fine!"

McKelvey supervised the paying of the bill, himself handing Alex the two dollars and a quarter due him in change.

Upon the point of wearing his old clothes back to the farm Alex had been obdurate.

"Na, na," he said. "I'll just hae the new ones in a box, if you please."

When they left the store, they strolled slowly up to the livery stable.

"Have you seen Pat Crowdey?" Alex asked.

"Yes," said McKelvey, "he's been in town twice with his uncle. He seems to like this country pretty well. He was asking for you, too. You lads ought to get together and compare notes. Why don't you both come in for the Fourth of July? It's a big day here."

"Why is that again?" Alex asked.

McKelvey put back his head and laughed until the position of the silk hat was endangered.

"Why, you ignorant young Britisher!" he said, his tone assuring Alex that no serious criticism was intended. "Did you never hear of the American Revolution of 1776?"

Alex's blue eyes twinkled.

"Oh, aye. I guess there was a wee bit skirmish over here aboot that time."

McKelvey slapped his leg.

"You're canny, Alex! Just remember not to refer to it in those terms to anybody else. If you're going to be an American you must keep in mind that the Fourth of July is the celebration of our freedom from the overpowering tyranny of Great Britain! Do you think you can swallow that and digest it? Well, that's the keynote of the occasion, so we put off firecrackers, we make speeches, we have parades, we send up balloons, we bring our best girls to town—we wear our new suits—"

"So!" said Alex. "I might be comin' in."

"I'll send word to Pat. He'll likely be bringing his cousins, the Crowdey girls. I wouldn't be surprised," he added with great casualness, "if Meggy would like to come. Well, Alex, good luck on the coal bank. Go ahead with your plans, and let me know if you need me."

"I will, sir. Thank ye for all your kindness."

As Alex drove off, McKelvey stood on the cobblestone street, his coat pushed back, his thumbs in his armholes, and a strange look on his face.

"There," he said softly to himself, "—although he doesn't know it—there goes the great MacTay."

Alex drove home slowly. He wanted to prolong this his first holiday and to take his fill of the bright weather. His eye, always keen for beauty, swept the hills and valleys with an inner vision, for the old verse-making habit was hard to shake off.

"Na, na, that's behind me," he reprimanded himself as one phrase and then another rose in his mind. "It's no' a man's work, makin' rhymes!"

The poetry which back in Lamson Green had seemed so natural and proper not only to himself but to his associates, now was out of place. Just as in Scotland the green hills and glens had been an end of beauty in themselves; while here, even though fair, they were but the outer covering for the coal which was some day to make his fortune.

He smiled as he thought of the new suit. He would plan his course carefully in regard to Meggy. He would not ask her to go with him to Greensburg on this Fourth of July day until she had once seen him in his new clothes.

"What a differ a pair of long breeks do make on a body!" he thought complacently.

In the new suit he would not be afraid to stand up to Harry Dennim himself.

Bill was not back yet, Alex noted when he put the horse in the barn. He left his box in the buggy shed until later when he

could smuggle it into the house under cover of darkness; then he walked up to the back porch, where Meggy was sitting with some sewing. In the new assurance which his purchases gave him, he stood for a moment upon the step and looked up at her. She seemed in her girlish beauty so immeasurably far above him. But there would come a time . . .

"Hello, Alex," she said graciously. "Did you have a good trip?"

"Fine. It's a grand day."

"Did you see Uncle Andy?"

"Aye. He was askin' about you."

"He's a wonderful man. I think he ought to be a judge or a senator or something, don't you?"

"Aye. He's got a good head on him, yon."

"He seems to like you, Alex," she said shyly.

"We get on fine!"

Then as Meggy said nothing more, he went on into the kitchen where he could give the news to the women without feeling the hot waves of longing and fear that swept him in Meggy's presence.

By late bedtime Bill had not returned. Alex urged the women-folk to go on to bed, saying he would read awhile in the kitchen and wait for the traveler. They finally agreed though Mrs. Parkinson was anxious and Mrs. MacIntosh decidedly irritable.

"It's just like him to be late," the latter said, bringing her cane down sharply as she progressed toward the stairs. "He'd be a good hand to send for sorrow, that one! He's met up with another windbag somewhere, belike, an' they're talkin' about what don't concern them."

"Now, Granny," Meggy remonstrated gently.

The old woman looked a little ashamed, but her long nose still twitched, a sure sign of her wrath.

"Well, Meggy, you know yourself every time he goes away he comes home with a new horse and a new story about somebody; an' we can't eat either of them, more's the pity! Alex, mind you

lock the door there when he does get back, for he'll never think of it. Well, well, girls, come on. We may as well get our sleep."

Alex settled himself by the kitchen table, drawing the lamp nearer. He had done little reading since he had been here. Now with relish he fingered the papers that Tirzah always carefully saved for weeks because of their infrequency. He ought, he told himself, to begin reading American news if he was going to be a good citizen. One thing he had missed, though until now unconsciously, was the discussions that went on in the old smiddy at Lamson Green. With a quick vivid flash of memory he saw Peter Whinnery and Robert Allison and Jamie Hay gathered about the forge with Hendry his father in the center while the talk ran on the Irish land purchase bill, and the names of Gladstone and Balfour and Parnell were thick upon the tongue. Here, he had heard little comment either on the country's politics or on world affairs.

He unfolded the *New York Times*. Its make-up looked foreign to him, but he scanned the headlines eagerly:

Emperor William at Opening of Reichstag Says, Peace Assured by a Larger Armament.

Stanley Lionized in London.

Madame Patti's Last Appearance in *Traviata*.

But the American news itself was unintelligible. There was much talk apparently of "silver," and a certain McKinley tariff bill. The President of the country, he gathered, was a Mr. Harrison. What the names of all the political parties were, he could not make out.

"They'll no' be Whigs and Tories at any rate," he muttered. He read one column carefully:

If any proof were needed of the recklessness of Republican leaders it would be found in the way in which they rushed the Service Pension bill through the House yesterday. This is a measure which will add at least \$50,000,000 to the expenditures, which will make any serious reduction of the taxes impossible,

and which if enacted at all should have had the most careful consideration and the most thorough discussion. But it has had no more of either than would be given to a bill to pay for a lame mule taken by the army twenty-seven years ago. . . .

"Aye, they seem to be bad ones, them Republicans. But I'll have to get Mr. McKelvey to set me straight on all this. You have to know which party you're in afore you can tell what to believe in the papers!"

The other reading matter at hand was the almanac, which Mrs. MacIntosh studied constantly with great care. One of the vexations of her soul was that Bill was so rashly independent of it.

"He'll pay neither heed nor hap to the signs," she often lamented. "He's that glaikit! No wonder he's a poor farmer."

The pamphlet was new to Alex and interested him. The little woodcuts, showing the farmer's work throughout the year, the hieroglyphic signs of the zodiac and the planets, the conjecture of the weather, and the miscellaneous information contained within it were sufficient to while away a long hour if need be. He leafed through the pages, his eye falling upon enlightening sentences here and there.

Good humor aids digestion.

Watercress contains much iron and is a real blood medicine.

Annual rotation of pasture for sheep is very desirable to avoid stomach worms.

Mice do not like the odor of camphor.

It is a common practice to feed bread to horses in European countries.

Shakespeare had a vocabulary of 21,000 words.

At least one nest should be provided for every five laying hens.

And then, this:

The human face is by far the world's most important bit of scenery. In beauty it matches the flowers; in loveliness it sur-

passes the landscape; in novelty it outstrips the mountain; and in radiance it is richer than the sunshine. Above all, it is a window of the soul.

Alex stared at the words as though they had said themselves aloud. Who but Meggy could fit that description? It was her face, so far beyond all dreams sweet and fair, of which the almanac spoke. He cupped the paragraph tenderly with his hands as though it were living flesh, and reread it slowly. Aye, it was what he himself would have said of her out of his own heart.

Then his eyes fell upon the sentiment below, and a tremor went through him. What hand of destiny had placed it there?

Victories that are easy are cheap and like the morning mist vanish quickly. Success, born of tears, fighting and struggle, is likely to last a man's full life. For such things is the price fortune demands.

He stared at it incredulously.

"I've got to have this page to keep by me," he said suddenly aloud. "It's like as though somebody knew I'd be readin' it when they wrote it."

He looked at the columns on the reverse side: "Weeks and Days. Remarkable Days. Moon South. Moon r. and s. Moon's Place. Aspects of Planets. Sun rises. Sun sets."

It was for February, now gone. The chances were Mrs. MacIntosh would never miss it. With a quick movement he cut the page out with his penknife, folded it and put it into his breast pocket. It was like a talisman now, a charm against fate both for his love and for the career he was determined to carve for himself.

"An' I'll pay 'the price fortune demands,'" he repeated soberly to himself. "Nae fears!"

He pushed the papers aside as a faint sound of horse's hoofs came to his ear. He lighted the lantern that stood on the back porch, then went to the barn to wait till the traveler rode up. Bill dismounted and greeted Alex, unperturbed as usual.

"Guess I'm a little late, ain't I? Folks in bed?"

"Aye. They're all away near two hours ago."

"That's good," said Bill. "I just met up with a man I hain't seen for years, over in Blairsville, an' we was just gassin' there. Wonderful how time flies, ain't it? Well, what do you think of this one?" He pointed to the horse.

Alex grinned as he held the lantern to the horse's head. "It's as like the other as two peas in a pod!"

"Ain't it?" said Bill proudly. "I never forget a horse onct I've had a good look at it, so I found this animal just where I thought he was. I had a hard time puttin' the deal through, but I got him. I think a Monday, I'll get an early start and take him up to Tom Miller's, an' we'll just put Fallin'-fits out of the way up there. I had thought," he added wistfully, "I'd like to bring him home an' get a little phosphate money out of him mebbe. But 'tain't safe. Harry Dennim might just ketch me with him. How'd you get along today?"

"Fine," said Alex. He brought his box from the buggy shed. "I got a few things I've been needin', an' I thought tomorrow if you'd lend me a rig I might be lookin' in at church."

"Sure," Bill agreed heartily. "Mother an' Meggy, they al'ays take the top buggy an' the gray mare, but you can drive the old black in the buckboard. I'd go along with you, but I al'ays sort of make it a practice to rest on Sundays. You know, Alex, that there Fourth Commandment don't say a haet about goin' to church. Not a haet! The preachers all sort o' keep that dark, but it's a fact. The Bible just says, 'On the Sabbath thou shalt not do any work.' An' it tells you to rest your animals, too. Now is drivin' a horse four mile in the heat on Sunday an' four mile back, restin' him? But, as I al'ays says to Mother, 'If your conscience allows you to drive in to church every Sunday, why, you go ahead. Mine now's awful tender on some points.'"

Bill chuckled, then lowered his voice a little as they passed up the walk under the bedroom windows.

"You see I had to have some argument to stop the women-

folks from al'ays pesterin' me to go, so I thought this one up, an' by golly it stumped 'em!"

Alex was laughing as they entered the kitchen, but made no move to sit down for a chat. When Bill got a start on theology there was no stopping him even if the clock did say midnight. Taking off his shoes that he might not wake the women, and holding his box tightly to his breast, Alex climbed the stairs, leaving Bill searching the cupboard for apple pie.

The next day was warm and bright. Tirzah and Meggy drove off early to be in time for Sunday school. Alex dressed slowly and with the utmost care. When he was ready he came down to the kitchen, where Mrs. MacIntosh was hobbling about the stove. She turned, eyed him sharply, and dropped the tin lid in her hand.

"Good lands, Alex! Why, you look like a preacher! Where did you get them clothes?"

"In Greensburg. I was needin' a suit."

"Why, you look as slick as if the cats had licked you. Mind now, but you do! Well, haud away then an' see you remember the text when you get back."

There was a peculiar light of admiration in the old lady's eyes that warmed Alex's heart. In the conquest of Meggy any help from Mrs. MacIntosh would be useful.

There was no sign of Bill about, and so he harnessed the black horse to the buckboard, treading cautiously in his new soft shoes, and finally set off down the road in the direction of New Salem, sitting very straight as on the previous day, acutely conscious of the challenge of his own strength and powers and also of the fact that today marked the first real step in his courtship of Meggy.

The road was a quiet one, winding up hill and down, between long wayside grasses, and through cool strips of woods.

For nearly four miles it remained a narrow country lane, taxing the skill of the drivers at the points where two buggies must pass each other, until it came out at last upon the wide dusty

Pike. Here Alex turned left, and in a few minutes was crossing the covered wooden bridge and driving slowly up the main street of the village of New Salem. He had asked Bill a few questions after breakfast, so he would know where to turn off for the church, but the numbers of buggies and carriages lining "the green" left him in no doubt that his objective had been reached. He drove along, looking for a vacant hitching post, catching a glimpse as he passed of the gray mare comfortably established in one of the long row of wooden sheds behind the churchyard.

At last he found a spot and tethered the black horse; then, his shoulders erect and his eyes eager, he made his way slowly toward the square brick church. The service apparently had already begun, and he was glad.

He had a sudden sinking realization of his own strangeness as he paused in the vestibule listening to the many voices above raised in song. But he shook off the feeling, and climbed the stairs, his plan being to sit near the back where he could look for Meggy. He suffered a moment of embarrassment when he reached the top and saw the size of the congregation. Aye, it was away bigger than the auld kirk at home! There was an empty aisle seat, however, at the back, and he slipped into it. Even as he seated himself he caught a glimpse of Meggy's blue straw bonnet near the front in the middle block, with Tirzah's black Sabbath silk beside her. Underneath the blue straw, like a lodestone to his sight, shone the golden braids. In all the months at the farm Alex had never felt the satisfaction of his senses as he did now. There, for many reasons, he averted his gaze from her as much as possible. But here he could sit with his eyes riveted upon her and still be safe, for no one could tell that he was not looking at the minister. For a whole hour he could feast so, unhindered.

Vaguely as through a dream he heard the words of the songs and the prayers as he sat bolt upright in the pew corner. During the sermon there was the drone of bees through the wide-open

windows, the muted sound of voices from the other church near by, and now and then a sharp whinny from one of the horses. Alex's attention never wavered. He thought of Meggy's hair, and what the wonder must be of seeing it unbound, hanging about her shoulders. He thought of touching it, feeling the soft threads upon his fingers. He thought of her body worshipfully as a holy thing. He half smiled occasionally, remembering the two tiny freckles on her tilted nose, and the way her eyes crinkled at the corners as she laughed, and said, "My goodness!"

It was a short service to Alex though the big clock on the side wall ticked away an hour and a half. He rose at last with a start for the benediction, and then, his heart beating fast, he went down the stairs and out into the churchyard. Already a few men and boys had gathered there on either side of the front walk. Alex ranged himself with them, watching closely, missing nothing. They stood about, shifting awkwardly from one foot to the other, exchanging a few words now and then as they watched the congregation pass out. When a woman or a girl glanced toward them they raised their hats self-consciously.

Suddenly Alex stiffened. Coming out the door with his offensive smile, debonair and assured, was Harry Dennim. He sauntered through the group at the other side and took his place almost opposite Alex.

"He hasna caught sight of me yet," Alex thought, "may the Deil tak' him!"

Before he had more than time to glance back to the door, Tirzah and Meggy appeared and came leisurely down the walk, speaking decorously to this one and that. As a kindly Fortune should have it, Meggy walked nearest to him. It was doubtless the intensity of the look in Alex's eyes that drew her own to his. But not even he expected what happened. For Meggy stopped, stone-still, unconscious of all around her, her lips parted in amazement, as she fixed her gaze upon him.

"Why—why, Alex!" she exclaimed as though they two were alone in the churchyard.

Remembering the other men's gesture, Alex raised his hat, but he could not speak. There was silence all around them for a second as they looked deeply at each other, while the rest of the churchgoers glanced from the strange young man to the spell-bound girl. Then Tirzah caught her daughter's arm.

"Come, Meggy," she whispered, "don't make a show of yourself."

At the words Meggy's face flooded with color—cruel, shamed, telltale scarlet, and she hurried with Tirzah away from the church toward the sheds. The other women began whispering too, as they passed on. Alex could hear them.

"Who is he? The hired man? You don't mean it!"

"Who is he?"

"Did you see Meggy get red as a peony?"

"What made her stop like that when she knows him?"

"Who is he, did you say?"

But the men, still standing wise-eyed in their places, saw something else. They saw Harry Dennim stare across at the newcomer with a bitterness like death upon his face. They saw the stranger, with his strong chin set, stare back at him grim and implacable. And though no glove was thrown it might as well have been. They all knew that a struggle was on, and that it would be to the finish.

Not till Harry Dennim turned to speak to the man next him, did Alex move a muscle. Then, without hurrying, he walked back to the black horse, untied it, and drove off. He wondered that the beat of his heart did not sound above the noise of the buckboard wheels, for he was filled with a great and almost awful elation. The most he had hoped for was that Meggy would notice his new clothes as she passed him by. As it was, something tremendous had occurred. For that one breathless second after Meggy's cry, when he had held her eyes to his, she had been his own as though he had possessed her. And Meggy had felt it, he was sure. Else why the beauty and the agony of that hot blush?

As to Harry Dennim, there was in Alex's heart along with the deadly hate, a feeling of victory. They had faced each other man to man, the issue between them clearly revealed not only to themselves but to those who stood by. And Harry had been the first to shift his gaze after Meggy had gone on without seeing him!

Alex was on the narrow road now, winding between the rich wheat fields and the woods. So absorbed was he with his own thoughts that he did not hear the approach of a buggy in the soft dust behind him. All at once he heard the cut of a whip and looked over his shoulder in time to see Harry Dennim driving his horse almost at a gallop full upon him.

"He'll be for takin' a wheel off me," Alex cried out to himself. But not for nothing had he driven horses through the narrow Scottish lanes. He gave the black a sharp cut and pulled him as he sprang hard up on the bank to the right just as Harry passed him like an avenging whirlwind with barely an inch to spare. Alex's brow was black.

"You'll sing small, my larkie, when I get through wi' you," he muttered between his set teeth.

Dinner was already on the table when he got back to the house. He did not look at Meggy, who was unusually silent. Mrs. MacIntosh was busy making inquiries about the church service: Was it a big congregation? Who sang in the choir? Were there any new dresses out? What was the text?

Before Tirzah could answer the latter Bill slapped the table and burst into a hearty guffaw.

"I heard a good story yesterday—" he began.

"Think shame of yourself for speakin' of it, the kind of stories you gather up," his mother-in-law adjured him.

"Mind it's the Sabbath day, Bill," Tirzah put in fearfully.

"Well, this here's a Scriptural story jist suited to the day. Man I met up with over in Blairsville told me—"

"An' mind you've a young girl listenin'," Mrs. MacIntosh interposed again sharply.

"I'm tellin' you it's polite enough fur ladies, ain't I? Well, seems there's this old cattle dealer out beyont Blairsville a ways. Great judge of cows, I guess. Well, last winter he took sick, an' his wife got scared an' sent for the preacher unbeknownst to him. He ain't never been much on religion, I gathered. Well, the preacher started out by readin' him the story of the Prodigal Son comin' home an' gettin' the fatted calf killed for him an' all. An' when he finished this here old codger shook his head an' says awful solemn, 'Parson, that there man in the story made an awful mistake.' 'Mistake?' says the preacher, nearly jumpin'. 'What do you mean?' 'Why,' says he, 'he'd ought to have killed that good-for-nothin' son of his an' raised the calf!'"

Alex laughed, and Meggy giggled; but the two women sat with unmoved faces.

"It's past bearin'," said Mrs. MacIntosh, "the way you blaspheme the holy Scriptures."

"Who's blaspheming?" Bill retorted. "I'll bet you I know my Bible better'n you do yourself." He pointed a sudden stubby finger at the old lady. "Who was the Zamzummims?" he demanded.

"What are you talkin' about?" she parried irritably.

"I'm talkin' about the Zamzummims. Who was they, if you know your Bible so well?"

"There never was such a word. You made it up. Stop your bletherin'." She was decidedly nervous.

Bill, having finished his dinner, rose with what dignity his stature would permit.

"All right! All right!" he said with maddening complacency. "Get your Bible an' look up Deuteronomy, second chapter, verse twenty, an' see who's bletherin'."

With this, Bill left the kitchen, taking the path to the orchard where he spent his Sunday afternoons.

Mrs. MacIntosh's nose twitched violently. "Fetch me the Book, Meggy," she said in a husky voice, "an' we'll see whether he's makin' a fool of us."

The old lady leafed through the pages, her thin hands trembling. To be caught in an error by Bill was a bitter disgrace to her. When or how he acquired his theological and biblical knowledge, no one knew. But every once in a while he pounced upon his mother-in-law with a question she could not answer. Her discomfiture at such times was pathetic.

Now she stopped, peered at a page, and said: "Deuteronomy, second chapter—I know there's never such a name—verse twenty—the very sound of it would tell you it couldn't be—"

Her face suddenly froze in astonishment and chagrin.

"Is it there?" Tirzah asked anxiously.

"Aye is it! But what signifies if it is?" She looked up sternly at Meggy and Alex. "It's not knowin' the fancy names in the Bible that'll save a man's soul, an' there's some that had better be mindin' that."

She repaired to her rocker by the window, where she could be heard muttering low maledictions in the direction of the orchard.

The next morning Alex woke at the first breath of dawn. The elation of the day before had not quite left him, although Meggy had been unusually remote from dinnertime on. The first step, he felt, toward the far-off realization of the M. on his hidden paper was accomplished. At least Meggy would not think of him now merely as the hired hand. Of this he was certain.

But another great step toward an ultimate goal was to be made this very Monday. The night before, he had talked quietly at the barn with Bill, who after his long day of rest was in a peculiarly agreeable and optimistic frame of mind. While he was still determined to take the new horse to Delmont as originally planned, he promised to show Alex, before leaving, where to secure the right posts for the new coal bank.

"It'll be a beginnin' anyway," Alex said to himself now as he hustled into his working clothes; "an' I'll feel better when I've made a start."

He was the first one up. He heard faint sounds from the Parkinson room as he went down the back stairs. He always glanced at Meggy's closed door, and then quickly away as though guilty of boldness. He made up the kitchen fire afresh, then went on out to the barn. By the time breakfast was ready he intended to have all the work there done, so that Bill could have no excuses for delay.

The morning was unusually fair. The mists lifted slowly from the far blue crest of the Laurel Ridge. Fresh from the cool baptism of the night the nearer green hills encircled the horizon. Light winds blew over the fields. Alex's heart was immeasurably light.

Breakfast over at last, he and Bill started across the farm, Alex carrying an ax.

"I don't see what you're rushin' this thing so hard fer, Alex," Bill remonstrated as they went. "My golly, you ought to take things a little easier! You'll go an' wear yourself out."

"What length will I be makin' the posts?" was Alex's answer.

"Well, you'll need three lengths. Some about six an' a half foot, some eleven, an' some twelve for the sills. If you're lucky you'll run into a solid roof of rock. That'll help some, an' save posts. But you ought to have a couple of dozen or thirty mebbe to start with."

As he talked, Bill was leading the way around the upper fields to some woodland that formed first a thick and then a scattered covering for a low hill. While Alex thought he knew the whole farm, he had never been in this spot before. They went through the woods, coming out on still higher ground, while still above rose a little knoll topped by locust trees.

Bill pointed them out. "There they are," he said, then added with surprising feeling: "Pity to cut them down bloomin', but if you're set on startin' now, you got to have locust posts. Know how to cut down a tree? Lemme show you. You start at this side an' chop her about half through. Then start on the other side, an' she'll fall down the hill. Watch yourself now so you



don't whack your shins. I'd help you, but I gotta be startin' for Tom Miller's. I ain't good for nothin' till I get that old Fallin'-fits off my mind. Well, go ahead now, Alex. Them's your trees."

Alex stood alone, his ax on his shoulder, and looked up at them. They grew a little apart from one another on the knoll, so that each was distinct against the blue sky. A light breeze swept them, and the fronded green leaves drifted delicately back and forth above the pendulous blossoms. These hung in long creamy-white clusters, drenched with that strangest of all perfumes of spring—the mysterious fragrance that haunts the senses with un-lived memories and unknown desires.

It was new to Alex, this exotic breath. And as he drank his fill of it the poet's soul within him that sometimes slept, but so far had refused to be laid, arose in power to stay his hand.

It was not only that every tradition of his race and his experience was set against the cutting down of a living tree; it was the sight of them standing there on the knoll with their feathery leaves and their white burden of sweetness!

He looked around him. On all sides stretched the wide fields: the red clover, the green oats, the rich brown of the ploughed earth, the silver shadows of the passing wind in the wheat. Beauty was here like the land itself, in quantity unmeasured. Even the white clouds did not press low and encompassable over men's heads as they did in the old country. Here they rode high, high up in the illimitable reaches of the heavens.

In the midst of it all stood the locust trees.

Alex rested his ax upon the ground while a sudden struggle possessed him. He could hear his mother's voice the night before he left Scotland, "An' you'll no' be forgettin' your rhymes, Alex. Send me a one now an' again."

It was more than his mother's voice that strove now within him. It was her blood that cried in his veins. The tingling thrill of beauty, the pause, the deep inner rapture—these were his heritage from her.

And it would be easy to hearken to it. Plainly as though from an open book he could read his life as it would be then. He would go about his work gay and carefree as he had done at Lamson Green, each day being a sufficient end in itself. He would sing and laugh and drink deep of the loveliness of the countryside. Then in quiet times, off by himself, he would set it down in verse as he had done in the old tablet at home, thereby paying a curious debt to his own soul. He would stay on with the Parkinsons; he would marry Meggy (for he felt strangely sure now since that moment their eyes had met with meaning that she would some day be his); he would inherit the old farm in time and raise his family among these hills. So his life would run. Even with the eyes of his youth he could see a certain grace, a fulfillment of his heritage, a natural fruitfulness written thus upon it. Surely enough for a man.

But there would be no fortune. There would be no power. This mighty tension he felt within him would relax and fail. And America would be to him even as Scotland had been, and no more.

He could explain it to no one, but this moment alone on the hillside he knew was to fix his fate more than the day he had sailed from Glasgow.

For a long time he stood motionless; then, with a sudden flexing of the great muscles that had sprung from the loins of the smith at Lamson Green, he seized the ax, leaped up the knoll, and with a mighty swing laid the shining metal upon the bark of the first tree.

The sharp sounds cut through the morning stillness. Alex gave himself no rest; the sweat streamed from his face, and his hands were sore upon the ax hilt as he swung stroke after stroke. One by one the locust trees shivered, wavered, and crashed to the ground.

When the sun was overhead he stood, his legs trembling, his arms aching, and surveyed the scene. Even as the scattered

blooms were already dying, something in himself was now forever dead. But he gave it no requiem. Instead he measured off the post lengths with his eye, exulting in the clean tough fiber of the wood.

"From now on," he said aloud, "I'll never look behind me."

CHAPTER III

THE first year which Alex spent in America was always in his later memory a strange mixture of pain and satisfaction, joy and defeat, each emotion violent in its intensity. True to the implacable plan he had set for himself, he worked through June with superhuman strength, for the hay was ready for cutting and the farm work must not be neglected. While his example and direction kept Bill with a surprising degree of assiduity at his tasks, Alex found he also must work most of each day in the fields. As soon as the five o'clock supper was over, however, he started for the new coal bank.

His aching muscles remonstrated, but he set his teeth doggedly and worked on till the early darkness put a stop to it. He would stumble back then across the fields, his head sagging forward with exhaustion, his eyes unseeing, his brain unthinking. He scarcely spoke when he entered the kitchen but climbed the narrow back stairs, heavily threw himself, often too drugged with weariness to undress, upon his bed. From that moment until Tirzah rapped on his door the next morning, he knew nothing. There were no more buoyant awakenings with the sunrise. His body took what toll it could from the night hours.

But in a few weeks a totally unexpected enemy came upon him. The weather up to now had been genially warm. Alex spoke often of it. He loved the constant sunshine; it gave him energy; it was servant to his daily needs; and the magnificent optimism it engendered made his wildest dreams seem possible. He watched its effect upon the crops too. The wheat was quickly turning golden, and the new corn shooting up. Bill had

told him the young blades grew as much as four inches in a day. Alex thought he was joking, but he found it to be true.

There were rains too—usually, it seemed, at night—hard strong rains, sufficient for the earth; then following them, day after day of steady warmth.

By the middle of June the papers carried notices of a heat wave approaching from the west. Alex paid no heed to the family's comments, his mind being too much engrossed with the bank. He had dug and scooped day after day for the outcrop. Then one evening, the treasure lay unconcealed before him. *The coal!* Black, shaly stratifications in the upright rock of the hill below the elderberry bushes and the young sassafras trees. The coal, here in his very grasp. Like a miser he bent over it, gathering up handfuls of the black soil. The sharp hurt of it upon his hands was good, for it meant reality.

In a few more days he had his first posts in and was digging doggedly through the hard wall.

Then suddenly it came—the terrible heat wave of 1890. Each day the sun rose behind a bloody mist. Not a breath of air stirred. A dank heat lifted from the earth and hung suspended to meet the merciless glare of the sky. The nights were little better than the days. Bill and Alex slept restlessly on quilts spread on the back porch. In the heaviness of the afternoons Tirzah and Meggy lay on the parlor floor, the windows of which were never opened winter or summer, while Mrs. MacIntosh kept to her bed for sheer weakness.

The wheat ripened, and the corn thrived; but the stream in the meadow dried up in a week's time, and the thick, choking dust from the road settled over every green thing.

And still there was no respite. Alex knew that his strength, on which he had depended utterly, was failing him. He had never felt before the draining of his body by this resistless outside force. It was all new to him: the hot beat of his temples, the burning waves across his eyeballs, the quick, momentary nausea, and the limpness of his muscles. He learned that the sun that

blessed the new world could punish also, and he thought now often, wonderingly, of the cool, misty summer winds at home, blowing in from the North Sea.

Bill accepted the weather not entirely with disfavor. He sat in his bare feet under the peach tree by the back door and quaffed great quantities of "vinegar sling," or cold buttermilk from the spring house.

"You might as well listen to me, Alex, an' jist rest up a little, while this here heat spell lasts. We got the hay all in the barn now, an' the wheat ain't hurtin'. Round the Fourth of July's time enough al'ays to start cuttin' wheat."

Alex felt his heart beat faster. This festive day was awaiting him like the magic of a dream. Soon after that Sunday on which he had appeared at church in New Salem (he had never gone again) he had detained Meggy down by the spring house one evening and awkwardly put his question as to whether she would go to Greensburg with him on the Fourth. Meggy had looked startled and flushed as she did now often when he spoke to her.

"I—I hardly know," she stammered.

"I'd like unco well to take you," he had said, in his earnestness lapsing into his old dialect.

Meggy raised her blue eyes then, smiling.

"And what does 'unco' mean?" she asked.

"It means awful well."

"Then—I guess I'd like unco well to go."

That was all, but it kept Alex's heart light even while his body was heavy with toil. A greater elation filled him when Harry Dennim stopped one evening and after a short talk with Meggy by the fence rode away scowling. Alex saw it all from the barn and thought he understood. Harry, too, had made his plans for the Fourth.

On the 3rd of July the heat wave reached its crest. A great sultriness clung to the earth all day like a smothering blanket. Once in a while a quick, dark cloud would shut out the sun.

"Looks like it's goin' to break soon," Bill predicted as they

started cutting wheat. "Yes, sir, I'll bet you we get a thunder-shower before night."

Old Mrs. MacIntosh was restless at supper time. She sniffed the heavy air from the window and scanned the heavens anxiously.

"There's goin' to be a storm, I doubt. My, I never can thole the thunder and the lightning. You haven't seen it yet, Alex. You'd think sometimes it was the Day of Judgment come. There's nothing like it in the old country. My, the air's awful close, gettin'."

Alex, too, felt as the evening wore on, a strange pent quality in the atmosphere, as though the hounds of the storm were being kept in leash with difficulty. He felt restless also, going without reason to the barn, to the carriage shed, to the coal bank, and back again to the house.

Suddenly, as they all sat around the kitchen table at nine o'clock, with Mrs. MacIntosh fingering the Book for evening worship, the air was rent with a violent crash. Alex jumped from his chair, while the rest laughed, including the old lady.

"By golly," Bill chuckled, "ain't you never heard thunder before?"

"Not the like of yon," Alex said, abashed.

But the storm had now come in earnest, and the family scattered to put down windows and close cellar doors. Alex stood in the kitchen beside the old lady, terrified and ashamed of his terror while the explosions followed one another in quick succession. He had indeed never heard sounds like these, just as he had never before seen lightning like a jagged sword of fire rend the firmament as though bent upon the earth's destruction. Mrs. MacIntosh huddled into the corner and put her feet on a wooden stool.

"Keep out of the draught, Alex, an' get your feet off the floor," she cautioned sharply. "There's no sense takin' chances. Oo—aye, I've been afraid of this all day. I'd always feel safer with the blinds down, but Bill won't have them, you might know!"

The others were back now, Meggy laughing from the excitement of chasing the storm from room to room, Bill ostentatiously casual, Tirzah controlling her fear with difficulty.

Suddenly the air split and shivered with a detonation that shook the house, while a blue light passed like a hand in front of the window.

"My God, that one struck!"

Bill jumped from his chair, his face white.

"It must have struck the chimney," Tirzah cried. "Oh, watch out for it running along the floor!"

But a scream from Meggy at the front window rose above the thunder.

"It's the barn! Father, it's the barn!"

With a speed of which he would not have deemed him capable, Alex saw Bill fling himself toward the door panting, "The stock! Alex! The stock!"

Alex fled after him, shaken by horror. Already against the black sky the flames were shooting. The great mows of hay, electric with the heat of the sun, had blazed in a moment's time.

Bill's voice was harsh above the storm.

"Get the cows out! I'll take the horses. Hurry, for God's sake."

Even as the thought of more water crossed his mind Alex knew the futility of any attempt to save the barn. It was doomed in spite of the rain as Bill had known at once. The fire was devouring furiously. He was close enough now to hear the crackle and the roar in the barn floor above.

He ran into the cow stable and began loosing the animals, his blood curdling at the strange sounds they made in the presence of their great enemy. Already bits of flaming boards and hay were dropping from above. It was a question of minutes only until the lower stables with their inflammable straw would be ablaze.

The cows were awkward and stubborn in their terror. There was no driving them, he found. Catching the first by the rope

he managed to haul it to safety in the barnyard, then he went back for another, and another. He could dimly see by the lightning flashes that Meggy stood on the fence screaming. Before long he heard strangers' voices too. Someone was pulling the buggies to safety. Someone was letting the pigs out of the pen. Bill shouted directions to these newcomers who at the tragically familiar sign of red against the storm-swept hills had ridden hard to help their neighbor in his hour of need.

The whole barnyard and the road and field beyond were soon a scene of confusion unspeakable. Above the roar of the fire came the shouts of the men and the cries of the animals with the thunder still rolling between.

As he led out the last cow, Alex knew the fight was over. Bill was working desperately with the big stallion who had tried in his frenzy to turn back into the fire, for the stables were blazing now.

Bill's face looked ghastly as he spoke to Alex.

"That's the end of it. Get out of the heat. At least we got the stock—"

"Father!" It was a cry of anguish, and Alex knew then that he had been hearing it for some time. It was Meggy, her yellow braids hanging drenched, her eyes frantic.

"Father, have you got Beauty?"

Bill gave a strange sob. "She's in the box stall next the cows. That's how I forgot her. It's too late now. . . . Go into the house, Meggy. It's no place for you—"

"But I can't bear it! We can't leave Beauty! I'll go after her myself—"

She plunged toward the heat, throwing the old coat she wore over her head. In a second Alex had caught her, snatched the coat, and flung her back toward her father.

"It's no use, Alex," Bill shouted hoarsely. "Come back! Better the horse dead than you. . . . Come back, you fool! Alex!"

But Alex plunged into the barn, holding the wet coat over him as a shield. He knew where the box stall was. He could

hear now Beauty's wild whinny of despair. Neither he nor Bill had distinguished it before in the general medley of frightened sounds. Alex's quick eyes saw one possibility. The barn floor had not yet fallen in. It would any moment. Meantime a faint break in the flame was to be seen along the feed boxes.

"A man's got to take chances," he heard himself repeating thickly over and over as though he were drunk. He fought his way along the dark line he had recognized, choking and scorched. He reached the box stall and climbed over the edge, calling Beauty by name. He opened the stall, then catching the horse's mane, flung himself on her back and headed her through the fire.

If Beauty had not been intelligently trained to obedience from her colthood there would have been no hope. But she had known nothing but the guidance of gentleness and wisdom from her birth. She trusted now the hands that wildly urged her on.

It was not far to the door and safety, but the danger was desperate. The flames rose around Beauty's delicate legs; the smoke was deadly, while overhead lurched the inferno of the barn floor ready to shower death upon them.

Suddenly Beauty stumbled to her knees with a cry of pain.

"I'll never get her up," Alex thought with despair. "I'll never get her out, now."

Then he raised his voice with a great effort.

"Call her, Meggy! Call her!"

Meggy, standing paralyzed with a new horror from the moment Alex had flung her back and entered the stables, now gave the long whistle that brought Beauty to her from the fields. It was a strange, hoarse whistle, but the horse recognized it. She scrambled to her feet still snorting and moaning.

"Come on, Beauty! Come on, girl!"

Beauty gave one desperate forward plunge that brought them to the door.

But just as they reached it a heavy blazing board from above

fell across Alex's arms. Bill caught him as he fell, and he heard Meggy's cry before the world all became suddenly very quiet for him.

When he finally came to himself, he was lying on the lounge in the kitchen. He could hear old Mrs. MacIntosh moaning and whimpering in her corner, and he could feel the intolerable burning of his arms. Then he opened his eyes and saw Tirzah and Bill and Meggy looking anxiously down at him. He bit his lips hard for a minute at the pain, and then he smiled.

"Is Beauty all right?" he asked.

Tirzah, seeing he was conscious, hurried away for some cordial, sending Bill for the sweet oil. So Meggy alone bent above him, her yellow braids hanging over her shoulders, her blue eyes tender and tearful.

"I can't ever thank you, Alex. But oh, you're so hurt!"

Suddenly a tear dropped upon his face, and the sensation of it was strange and beautiful beyond belief. He felt himself trembling.

"It was worth it," he said, looking up at her.

Nobody remembered that the next day was the Fourth of July. Alex's fine new clothes lay unheeded in their box, while he turned upon his bed and tried not to groan. For the first time in his life he was knowing acute physical pain. Tirzah had bound his arms up with sweet oil and cotton, but the suffering had kept him from sleep all night. More than that his head felt light and his limbs heavy.

The backbone of the heat had been broken, however, by the storm. A cool breeze now swept the fields and stirred the curtains at the windows. For this Alex was deeply grateful.

Downstairs old Mrs. MacIntosh sat in her corner muttering a dirgelike chant.

"Oh, God help us, the barn's burnt! The barn's gone and the hay and the feed. God pity us! No place to house the stock. The barn my Hendry helped build with his own hands, burnt to the ground! God help us! The place'll go to rack now."

Tirzah looked white and shaken, and Bill for once was silent. Between her chantings the old lady railed bitterly at him.

"It's the judgment of the Lord on you, that's what it is! You're always takin' His name in vain with your loose talk, an' you never darken the sanctuary doors! Why wouldn't the Lord punish you for your sins? Oo, aye—aye—aye—aye!"

Fresh from the desolation outside, which seemed in the light of day more incredibly hopeless than it had the night before, Bill came up to Alex's room and sat down heavily. There was no jocularity now. Bill was broken with the calamity. His mother-in-law's interpretation of the fire, too, seemed to weigh upon him in spite of himself.

"She says the Lord done it on account of me. Now you know I can't hardly believe that, even if I ain't so quick on the trigger when it comes to religion. I don't believe the Lord would do a thing like that just for spite. Durned if I don't think better of Him than that."

He paused, then rubbed his forehead wearily.

"Lightnin', though," he added, "does look like it come straight from heaven, that's sure. Well, it was a bad day when it lit on us."

Alex moved his burning arms.

"What are we going to do now?" he asked abruptly.

"Well, the big wagon shed's still standin'. It jist lay enough out of the wind not to catch. I can fix it up to put the stock in. The corncrib's left, an' I guess the neighbors'll lend a hand some day till we knock up some kind of a shade for the wheat an' the oats. You know, Alex, I've been thinkin'."

"Aye?"

"When you get well enough you go ahead with the coal bank. I'll tend the farm. That there coal bank'll mebbe help make up some of this loss."

"Aye," said Alex, "I think you're right on that."

It was three weeks before Alex worked again. McKelvey came out when he heard all the sad story and brought a doctor with

him. He was shocked over the loss of the barn, and he was anxious about the boy whom he had come unconsciously to regard as his own. Alex's face struck him as thin and older-looking. The doctor, however, was encouraging. He left a healing salve for the burns and a stiff tonic.

"You can't kill a Scotchman," he stated cheerfully. "They make 'em of tough stuff over there."

"There's no point in trying it, though," McKelvey said soberly, and remained in the room after the doctor had gone.

"Now listen, my lad," he said. "I've heard all the story from Bill, and I want you to take some advice. When you're up and about again, there's to be no more working all day in the fields and all evening in the bank! I'm backing you, Alex, but you must use common sense. Better be a live dog than a dead lion, you know."

"Take a look at the bank afore you go," was Alex's reply.

McKelvey's report of it was the best medicine Alex got that day.

"Fine, lad, fine! I'd no idea you had got so much done. You've started in at just the right place on the drift, too, for you've got a good natural slope for drainage there. You're on the right track now. Just go ahead—only not till you've got your strength back. I'll be out soon to check up on you. Mind! 'It's not too late tomorrow to be brave.'"

The latter words remained in Alex's mind, though in the following days he questioned them deeply. He had, indeed, more than physical pain and weakness to bear. For Harry Dennim, acting as though the fire had been a direct invitation from heaven, came daily now to the Parkinsons with offers of help; and Bill in his desperate need was compelled to accept them. It was Harry who rounded up the neighbors for a day's work each week on the new shed. It was Harry who always worked on after the others had gone and then sat long over the supper table with the family.

Every day he rode over to lend a hand for an hour or so, and

Alex, watching from his window, seethed with bitterness and helplessness to note that Harry was a good workman, quick and capable. The big new shed was built, and the old one equipped with stalls for the animals. Even Meggy, with hammer and nails, did her part. Sometimes she and Harry laughed together, and once Alex saw his hand touch hers as they handled a board. He also heard her say one day earnestly, "How can we ever repay you for your kindness, Harry?" And at the look Dennim gave her Alex felt like murder.

Often in the evenings they drove away somewhere in the Dennims' smart buggy, while from old Mrs. MacIntosh, who daily stopped in Alex's room to visit awhile, came the continual refrain, "My, I don't know what we'd do just now without Harry! He's been a good neighbor."

It was in these days when his heart was sore that Alex took out again his two letters from home, and reread them carefully. They were from his mother and, even though couched in the restraint that was fitting, they somehow breathed her passionate love for him:

Your father's fine an' workin' as usual in the smiddy, but Peter Whinnery's got a terrible hoast sleepin' out one night in the rain when the ewes were droppin'. He's been to the doctor and got a bottle and we dose him up with teas, Lizzie and me, whenever he comes in for a crack. He's always askin' after you, and so does all the neighbors. The new minister and his wife always mentions you to me on the Sabbath, and very kind it is of them. I'm startin' on some woollies you may need come the winter. It passes the evenings to knit. I'm glad Mrs. Parkinson keeps your buttons on and sees to you. It's good your lot's been cast with nice people. Give her my kind love for takin' care of you, and her mother too. Have they no bairns? You never speak of any. The Lammermoors were past believin' last night for beauty. I'm glad you're in high country there. It's ay liftin' to the spirit. Have you been to the kirk? Have you made any rhymes yet about Americky? When I row the clock I'm always thinkin' of your kist settin' there in front of it the night you

left. Write us a line as often as you can, lad. It seems like you're not so far away when a letter comes.

When Alex at last was able to work again, with only the scars on his arms as physical reminders of the fire, he gave Bill no chance to change his mind in regard to the division of their labor, but started at once for the coal bank. To his delight he found that by working there all day he could accomplish prodigious results. The stout posts were soon all set in on either side about two and a half feet apart, with cross timber for the roof of the entry. Before he thought it possible there loomed under his pick the black, shiny walls of the coal and the slate roof that would doubtless carry throughout the length of the mine. Nature, it seemed to Alex, must have had this very bank in mind when she cast up the hill. Indeed there seemed to him a strange inevitability about it all. He felt as though in dreams he had seen just this spot. On the outside, the delicately stratified shale rock on the hill above the opening still supported its feathery ferns and blooming elderberry bushes, while in the entry the locust posts looked as though they had grown there. Beyond there was the cool damp, ancient blackness of the mine.

In the evenings Bill came out to comment upon the progress made and give advice about the track and the small wooden cars necessary for transporting the coal to the outside. These latter, Alex determined to make with his own hands, for money was scarce and he would need them soon.

July passed, and August with more intense heat in the grain fields but coolness at the bank. Alex had regained his strength now. Sometimes it seemed to him that his muscles had never before been so hard and enduring. He too, he thought sometimes with a smile, could lift a little coster donkey with ease and carry it over Lamson Toll even as his father had once done.

The track was finally laid, and two small wooden cars completed. Alex had built the bodies from rough oak boards secured from a neighboring sawmill; but McKelvey had advanced

the money for the wheels and iron bands, as well as for a large, inscrutable-looking gray mule that would haul the loaded cars out of the mine. Bill had bought the animal from a man near Greensburg at a bargain, and while he always took care to state that this was the first time he had ever been "guilty of mule tradin'," yet he could often be seen with his head on one side looking up at the mule quizzically as though he found its enigmatic personality more interesting than the horses.

When everything else was done, Alex decided to knock up a small shanty near the bank, where shovels and picks could be kept, and where, as Bill advised, the diggers could get shelter and possibly warm themselves over a bit of fire in the winter.

By September they were ready to dig in earnest, and there came a day when, flushed and triumphant, Alex surveyed at the mouth of the bank a pile of irregular black lumps. When on a still later day one of the near-by farmers drove up with his wagon and purchased the output, Alex's delight knew no bounds, and he longed for McKelvey to share it.

The news soon spread that the Parkinson coal bank was open, and many thrifty farmers came through the early fall to buy. The first hint of coming difficulty was given by one of them on a wet October day.

"I want to haul all I can before the weather breaks," he said. "It's as much as your team's worth to get through this road in the winter."

"Which road?" Alex said quickly.

"Why, this here stretch through the farm. It gets hub-deep, I know that."

"How will the roads be into the other coal banks round?"

"Just as bad or worse. Seems like there ain't much choice."

That night Alex pondered deeply. Here was a hint too important to be ignored. If the road leading into the Parkinson coal bank could be made better than those to the rival banks it should switch additional custom to him.

"We've got to be fixin' that," he said to himself, though the

way it was to be accomplished was not clear. All Bill's time was still needed on the farm, and already Alex had found it necessary to supplement his own work in the bank with that of a near-by farm hand out of a job. How could a moment be taken for making a road?

For several days he thought the matter over; then one night he penned a letter (when he knew Bill was planning a trip to New Salem) which in a week's time brought another young man to the Parkinson door at nightfall. He was a dark-haired, freckled-faced giant with an easy smile and a light-hearted gleam in his eye. Suspended from a stout stick which he carried over his shoulder was a bundle wrapped up in a blue shirt. It was Pat Crowdey.

Alex saw him first and jumped from his chair to greet him. They shook each other's hands long and hard while their native brogue sounded richly unintelligible as they talked rapidly together. It was entirely characteristic of Alex that, having decided upon the necessity and rightness of his plan, he should have thought it unnecessary to mention it beforehand or apologize for its sudden presentation now. McKelvey, he reasoned, had brought *him* here unannounced: why should he not bring Pat? True, he had expected Pat to reply to his letter before turning up so promptly in person; but this was so much the better.

So, going back into the kitchen, he introduced his friend to the wide-eyed family.

"This is one of my cabin mates on the crossin': Pat Crowdey. He's been at his uncle's place farmin', but I juist thought with the winter comin' on he might come over an' help me at the bank."

"So here I be," said Pat cheerfully. "'Make the best of it,' as the old woman said when she fell in the pigsty."

The Parkinsons were warm-hearted, and life was never too eventful to keep a surprise from being acceptable. Besides, there was Alex's proven judgment to consider as well as Pat's disarming smile. In a few minutes the stranger was seated at the

table with a warmed-over supper before him, while Alex was telling his plan for the repairing of the road. Bill, as usual when a new idea was suggested to him, went through a stage of deep thought and then agreed with it profoundly.

"Durned if I don't believe you're right on that, Alex. Yes, sir, I've often thought of that myself. We got the limestone right on the place, too. All you have to do is jist to quarry it, an' you've got your roadbed. Course," he added hastily, "I can't help none with that, now cider-makin' time's comin' on, but I'll show you tomorrow where the limestone is."

When the two young men went upstairs that night—for they were to share Alex's room—Pat sat down on the edge of the bed and looked up quizzically at his friend.

"The old sayin' is, 'Never be choosin' your wife nor your linen by candlelight.' But, begorra, if yon girl's any prettier in the daytime I'll be thinkin' she's an angel!"

A sharp fear struck Alex's heart. He had brought Pat here, thinking only of the work. He had been heartily glad to see him. Now, in a sudden panic, he wished he had never sent for him. Pat noted his face and his silence shrewdly, and then remarked, "An' what you'd like to be sayin' now to me is, that there's to be no poachin' on your presarves—eh, Alex?"

"Belike it is," Alex answered shortly.

Pat laughed as he rolled into bed.

"Och, you can make your mind aisy. I've got me own girl picked out. It's me cousin Kathleen, may the saints bless her! She's got a heart of gold an' a face like a Michaelmas daisy. An' I'll bid you now to dance at our weddin', though I don't know when it'll be."

So Alex's fears were laid, and before long the two lads whom Fate had curiously thrown together were sleeping side by side.

In the weeks that followed, the arms that had grown strong beyond the sea on Scotch "parritch" and Irish "praties" gave themselves to the quarrying and breaking of limestone—a hard task that left the muscles stiff and the back sore. But little by

little a solid bed of broken rock extended from the mine mouth through the fields and out to the main country road. Sometimes Pat straightened his weary back and remonstrated.

"May the Devil admire me if we haven't got enough stone here already! It's not buildin' a wall we are, Alex."

But Alex merely set his chin and went ahead.

"We're buildin' a road that's got to be so good every farmer'll be tellin' his neighbors about it!"

When the stone was finally covered and the road complete, Alex and Pat joined the other worker in the mine. The pile of coal at the mouth now grew steadily. Soon the news spread over the countryside that excellent coal could be had at Parkinson's for *only a penny more on the bushel* than that of other banks, and you didn't have to kill your team or spend half a day excavating your wagon to get it hauled. There was a system in operation there also by which there was little delay for the purchasers. Around the post office in New Salem and in the back of Galloway's store, men told one another these facts. They lowered their voices if Bill happened to be near on one of his many "errands," and agreed knowingly that it was the young Scotchman who was running the mine.

Alex was indeed knowing a great satisfaction. Night after night, as they all sat in the big kitchen, he figured on pieces of wrapping paper and then carefully transferred his findings to a tablet. While Pat, all carefree, laughed with the womenfolks and played his mouth organ, Alex studied intensely how to save waste motion and increase his output. A dozen small short cuts and efficiencies had their birth in his mind during these hours. He heard nothing, saw nothing around him as he concentrated fiercely upon his problems. When he finally found a solution, he raised himself up, wondering for the moment that he was not actually at the mine.

Then he put away his papers and all thought of them with a temporary finality, and joined the others. For these winter evenings were happy ones. Under Pat's light-hearted questioning

it had been discovered that Alex could sing. Pat's own performance on the mouth organ fell just short of genius, and so there was music and plenty of laughter while the wind blew hard outside.

"Come away now, Alex, from your books there, an' gie us 'Rabin Tamson's Smiddy,'" old Mrs. MacIntosh would call out.

"Oh, please, Alex! That's such a funny one!" Meggy would add, while Alex smiled at her, as he had now grown bold enough to do.

"All right, Pat. Gie us a chord, man!"

Then Alex's rich baritone would fill the kitchen, while Mrs. MacIntosh clapped her thin hands softly in time, and Bill's big foot in its felt boot moved rhythmically with the song:

"Oh, me mither ment me auld breeks,
An' oh, but they were duddy, oh,
She sent me tae get shod the mare
At Rabin Tamson's smiddy, oh!"

From this he would wander off, perhaps, into "Caller Herrin'," or "The Bonnets of Bonnie Dundee," or "Wi' a Hundred Pipers." The more sentimental songs, he found he could not sing "wi'out makin' a fool of himsel'," as he told his own heart. But he would often intersperse the music with the repetition of old ballads learned at his mother's knee. Of these Meggy in particular never tired.

"Now, Alex, tell us again about Bessie Bell and Mary Gray. You're sure it's really true?"

"Oh, aye. It's true, right enough. It was time of the plague long ago. This Bessie Bell's faither was the Laird of Kinvaid, an' Mary Gray's was the Laird of Lednock. The girls was visitin' each other at Lednock when the pest broke oot, an' they built themselves a bower—"

"What's a bower?"

"Oh, a wee bit rustic hoose. Out at Burn-brae. They thought they'd get shut of the plague there, but it caught them juist the same; and they died of it."

Meggy would shiver at this point but urge him on.

"Now the verses, Alex. I can just see those girls when you say them."

Alex would fold his arms and tilt his chair against the wall. He could feel himself back in the kitchen at Lamson Green, with his mother sitting by the tall clock and Lizzie by the scullery door; while he, a round-eyed bairn, stood by the polished brass mantel rail listening as his mother slowly and dramatically repeated the words:

"O Bessie Bell and Mary Gray
They war twa bonnie lasses;
They biggit a bower on yon Burn-brae
And theekit it o'er wi' rashes.

"They theekit it o'er wi' rashes green,
They theekit it o'er wi' heather,
But the pest came frae the burrowstown,
And slew them baith thegither.

"O Bessie Bell and Mary Gray
They war twa bonnie lasses;
They biggit a bower on yon Burn-brae
And theekit it o'er wi' rashes."

Other old rhymes of his mother's which he had not thought of in years came again to his mind in these winter evenings.

"Here's a one!" he remarked suddenly one night. "It's aboot a chieftain that got killed."

"I like the sad ones best," Meggy said with a little anticipatory tremble. "Say it, Alex!"

"Saddled and briddled
And booted rade he;
Toom * hame came the saddle
But never came he.

"Down came his auld mither
Greetin' fu' sair,
And down came his bonny wife
Wringin' her hair.

"Saddled and briddled
And booted rade he;
Toom hame came the saddle
But never came he."

"Aye," old Mrs. MacIntosh commented. "There's a lot in that one."

Pat had small patience with the somberness of the Scottish ballads. When it came his turn he removed his mouth organ, and in a strong voice which lacked all the musical timbre of Alex's he would burst out in his favorite song, which, having eighteen rollicking verses, was generally conceded to be the quantitative equal of four of Alex's:

"Oh, well I remember, one foggy November,
Me mother said, 'Go make your fortune, me lad;
Go bother the ninny clear out of his guinea,'
So away then I scampered from Belen a fad."

"That last means Belfast," he always explained. "They were just after makin' it fit the rhyme."

Bill usually called for a good Irish jig to wind up with, and Pat always complied, his thick shoes clattering cheerfully upon the bare floor, to the lilt of the tune he played. Then as the

* Empty.

clock neared nine they were adjured by Mrs. MacIntosh to "compose themselves for worship," and soon after they were asleep in their beds.

All in all, except for the torture of his love, Alex had never been more content than he was during these winter months. They were selling all the coal they could mine. Each week he paid his helpers, set aside a small amount for upkeep, then divided the proceeds equally between himself and Bill.

Pat smiled whimsically one day as Alex handed him his money.

"I've a notion, Alex, that you'll be the sort of man that's always payin' wages, an' I'll be the sort that's always takin' them. Funny about men!"

Alex, somewhat embarrassed, said nothing.

"But I'll be after tellin' you one more thing, an' you can like it or lump it. By the time they carry me out feet first I'll have had as happy a life as yourself."

"Aye, belike you will," Alex answered soberly, "but ilka man has to go the way he's bent."

"For meself now, I want me own woman an' a flock of children round me an' a bit of a house an' enough to keep the soul in the body. But you're different. You want more."

"Aye! I do, that," Alex answered. And there the conversation rested.

The shanty had now taken on some of the properties of an office. An old potbellied iron stove had been set up, with a tin pipe projecting through the roof. A cast-off chair or two and a table from Tirzah's cellar completed the equipment. In the corner stood extra picks and shovels; and in rough open cupboards which Alex had built, there were kept odd bolts and rivets as well as the account books.

Here Bill now spent his days between the hours of caring for the stock. Alex had shrewdly seen that with the winter lull in the farm work he could use Bill in a capacity that would be congenial to him. He wanted someone in the shanty to greet

the customers affably, see to their orders, call him when necessary, put the money into the tin receptacle kept for it and set down the amount of the sale. All this Bill did willingly since it gave him a chance to talk with all comers, and sit at ease for hours beside the stove in the meantime.

At noon the men all gathered there with their lunch buckets, instead of crossing the fields to the kitchen, this being one of Alex's timesaving innovations. Quite frequently they had a caller. Harry Dennim developed the habit of riding over on various pretexts to see how things were going, and stopping to look at the black faces of Alex and Pat and their helper with an amused superiority while he conversed with a flow of language which made Pat's eyes open wide and made Alex's fingers itch for a grip on his collar.

Alex had always relished the earthy vulgarity of Bill's stories. Bill swore often, too—large, familiar, timeless oaths. There was always plenty of rough talk of a kind from all of them, but it was the hearty roughness of outdoor men. None of them in their speech ever crossed a certain indefinable line.

But Harry Dennim was different. His stories outraged a deep inner chastity which was a part of Alex's nature. He would turn away from him disgustedly, muttering, "A dirty bounder, yon!"

Bill always spat more profusely than usual after Harry had told his latest tale and departed.

"What he needs," Bill said to Alex one day, "is to have his tongue scrubbed with soap. Fact is, a little em'ry stone might be better. An' I wish," he added with emphasis, "that he'd get the hell off this place an' stay off!"

"Aye, an' I'm wishin' it with you," Alex agreed savagely.

For, as it had been from the beginning, the one great fear in his mind dealt with Harry's relations with Meggy. Ever since the fire the two rivals had each had a special claim upon the girl's kindness. Alex had risked his life to save Beauty, and suffered seriously in consequence. On the other hand Harry Dennim's help had been invaluable in the weeks of rebuilding.

A hundred favors had come from him which the womenfolk especially remembered with gratitude. Bill accepted them grudgingly and of necessity; but the fact still remained that Harry was a welcome guest at the house and openly a suitor for Meggy's hand.

On the nights when he drove off with her in his buggy or his sleigh Alex tossed in his unrest until Pat slapped him smartly and told him either to stay quiet in his bed or to take a lie on the floor.

"Besides," he usually added pointedly, "when a man's after leavin' his stable door unlocked he can't complain if his horse is stole."

But though Pat threw out broad hints as to what he felt his friend's course of action as a lover should be, Alex refused absolutely to discuss the matter or even mention Meggy's name if he could avoid it. The great silence of his father, Hendry, could fall upon him at times, and this was one subject upon which he could brook no discussion.

While he had his occasional dark moments of helpless despair, he had also through all the winter a sustaining hope that grew many times to a certainty. Since the fire, with the tenderness of that tear sealed within his heart, he had dared constantly to meet Meggy's eyes, not hiding from her the deep light in his own; and even following those nights in which she went off to parties with Harry, she still met his look almost, it seemed to him, with eagerness. Upon this, Alex lived.

Toward the last of February there came a day of snow. It began just before dawn with large light flakes, thickening as the hours advanced, into a heavy, unceasing, impenetrable fall. When Alex and Pat stopped work at the coal bank at five o'clock, they found the drifts across the fields as deep as their tall boots. It was almost dark, too, with the wavering gray-blackness of a snowy night. When they neared the house Pat, who was shaking with the cold, hurried into the kitchen while Alex kept on toward the improvised stable, ostensibly to help

Bill finish his work there but really to see whether Meggy was safely home.

As he neared it he saw Meggy emerge, having evidently just gotten Beauty settled for the night, and start floundering, a very small and defenseless figure, through the storm. Amazed at his own temerity, Alex leaped toward her.

"You canna plout through this," he cried. "It's too deep for you."

Without waiting to lose his courage, he lifted her in his arms, and once having done so, stood still, scarcely breathing, holding her against his breast. He had not realized till then how starved his senses were, how hot the current of his blood, how fiercely subjugated his body had been to his will. His arms trembled as he pressed her closer. Her face framed in the blue hood was so near to his, her cheeks so glowing from the cold, her eyes so startled and bright. There was no thought now, nor will, on Alex's part; there was only an inevitability like that of the elements themselves. He pressed his lips to hers and held them there, a burning fire in the falling snow, until Meggy, stunned, drew her head away from the support of his strong hand.

He carried her up the walk, neither of them speaking, and set her down gently upon the back porch. It was then Meggy called to her aid all Tirzah's modest precepts and all her own ideas of maidenly propriety. Alex could not see that she, too, was trembling.

"That was very wrong of you, Alex. Very—un-unmanly. I would not have thought you would do such a—such a thing!"

Alex, looking down at her in the soft light from the window, found her sober chastisement of him more unendurably appealing even than her laughter.

"There's one good thing about it," he said huskily. "Whether I did right or wrong, it can't be undone now."

And with that they both entered the kitchen. But Meggy would not meet his eyes again that night, and Alex was glad. He felt instinctively that this too had significance.

After the big February snowfall, which lasted for two weeks, spring began to steal over the countryside, and changes had to be made at the coal bank. Pat must needs go back to his uncle's now to plough for corn, and not only his strong arms but his cheerful spirit would be missed. Tirzah said good-bye to him as to a son; Mrs. MacIntosh wiped her eyes openly as she wished him well, while Meggy on Beauty bound for her school, and Bill on foot, traveled with him to the forking of the road.

Alex and Pat had lain awake a few minutes the night before, talking.

"When you've made your fortune, Alex, don't be forgettin' me," Pat had said jestingly.

But Alex replied seriously: "You're a fine worker, Pat, an' we're friends an' all. When I get myself a bigger job, will you come wi' me?"

"Sure," Pat said heartily. "Pay me enough, an' I'll be mar-ryin' me Kathleen an' settlin' down. May the saints send it soon!"

"I think," Alex mused, "I'll be stayin' here one more year, belike. The bank's beginnin' to pay well. We're gettin' near all the trade now. Two other little ones has shut down, I was just hearin' today. Then when I've gathered enough gear I'll be tryin' something a muckle bigger."

"Begorra but you're the quare one," Pat said wonderingly. "Here you've got a good livin' in your hand, an' you're talkin' about lavin' it!"

"But a man's got to keep pushin' ahead," Alex said earnestly.

"Has he now?" Pat inquired, yawning, and fell comfortably to sleep with the question unanswered.

Bill's services, too, had now to be dispensed with at the shanty. With a greater reluctance than usual he attacked the spring work of the farm. The loss of the barn still weighed heavily upon him. With all his slackness Bill had always taken a comfortable pride in his acres and his buildings. Riding home from a horse-trading expedition, he would greet the first sight of the big barn with satisfaction. The fact that it stood there, as

large, as solid as any man's, raised his dignity. But more than that it was his sanctuary. Here, when his mother-in-law's tongue grew too sharp for him, or when his own inner problems troubled him, he could retire in perfect security. He loved the sour, stale, pungent smell of the stables and the grain boxes and the summery fragrance of the hay above. There was ample room here for him to wander about, a king in his own domain.

Now, this was gone, as the charred ruins testified. Meggy, with the resilience of youth, could think of the fire now only in exciting relation to herself; Tirzah had accepted the disaster as she had all of life, with quiet resignation; only Bill and old Mrs. MacIntosh in their separate ways mourned unceasingly for the loss of the barn. And furthermore each knew—though the knowledge was arrived at by different mental processes—that there would never be another. Year by year there would be added more flimsy sheds and makeshifts; but a new barn with its wide-spreading mows to shelter the year's fecundity, and its ample rows of stalls to house the stock, would never rise upon the ruins of the old. For even the coal money was needed for daily necessities and for replacing lost machinery. And they both knew it would always be so.

The temporary breaking of Bill's spirit had one good effect, however. For the present he eschewed horse trading and kept industriously to the ploughing, however much he disliked the steady routine. Sometimes his old mirth broke through as he leaned over the fence in the dusk with Alex.

"Harry Dennim's never got to the bottom of that horse business," he chuckled one night. "He still brings in some sneakin' little remark about it. 'Do you ever see Tom Miller?' he says to me today. 'Sure,' I says, 'an' he always tellin' me that bay is the best buggy horse he's ever had. Course he says it takes a good horseman to *handle* him, for he's fast! But durned if I know why you ever parted with him,' I says to Harry. An' that skunks him. By golly if it don't!"

The mine now was reorganized. Two new diggers were hired,

and Alex himself was everywhere, instructing, supervising, pondering and figuring in the shanty, meeting the drivers as they came and helping them load the coal. Every week now the roll of bills in the gray sock in Alex's chest grew larger. But he steeled himself against complacency.

"It's no' a pinch to what I'll be makin' later," he would tell himself, already full of plans for opening up new rooms in the coal bank, and hiring more men by next winter.

"I might even drop a cent now on the bushel. That maun put them all oot of business," he considered shrewdly.

So April came; a tender April, with beguiling sunshine and delicate patter of rain on the new leaves. Although not as keenly as before, Alex perceived the beauty. He saw a world young even as he and Meggy were young, with love songs abroad and mating in the air. But there had been no repetition of that passionate kiss in the snowstorm, and even yet Alex at times was full of doubt as to what Meggy's real feelings were toward him.

Just now she was absorbed in plans for the closing event of her school year, a gala form of evening entertainment new then to the countryside, though common enough a few years later. Meggy had heard of it through a friend who had moved to Ohio, and was eager to be the first to try it. It was called a "box social." She explained it to him one night over the supper table.

"You see, the girls bring boxes of lunch all decorated with fancy papers and ribbons and things; and nobody knows which girl owns which box, for her name's put in the inside, and she must keep it a secret. Then they're all auctioned off to the highest bidder—"

"The girls is?" Bill inquired.

"Now, Father! My goodness!" Meggy laughed. "The boxes are auctioned off, and the men buy them; and when they open them up they eat supper with the girl whose name is inside, and

the money's to buy a big dictionary for the school, and I think it's going to be grand," she finished in a breath.

"Will they bring much now, these boxes?" Alex asked.

"Why, that's where the excitement comes in like at any auction. They'll all bring different prices. But I guess there won't many go for less than fifty cents, and maybe some might go as high as a dollar!"

"Sal," said Alex, "that's a fell price for a bit of lunch!"

Meggy's cheeks turned crimson.

"But it's not just the lunch," she answered spiritedly. "It's the fun and—and everything."

"Aye, it still seems like a waste of good money an' all," Alex went on, a deep guile growing within him.

"So you think you won't come to it, then?" Meggy asked with a peculiar look.

"Me? Na, na. I've nae time for such things," Alex said with calm finality even as his heart raced in his breast.

"Oh, *all* right," Meggy returned, and spoke to him no more that night.

But Alex, watching covertly, saw what he hoped to see. For several nights now, Meggy had closeted herself in the sitting room over some mysterious bit of work. This evening after a low consultation with her mother she brought it out to the kitchen table where Tirzah and Mrs. MacIntosh, drawing their chairs close, could watch her. To all appearances Alex was buried in his account books in one corner, his face set in lines of deep concentration. But he could hear parts of a low discussion going on.

"Mebbe I oughtn't to work on it here," Meggy whispered.

"Ach, what will he ever notice! He sees nothing—got his nose in them books," came from Mrs. MacIntosh.

"—not interested, I'm sure," said Tirzah.

So Meggy went on making pink tissue paper roses while Alex out of the tail of his eye missed nothing. He could see her fingers fashioning the petals one by one and sewing them

with thread to a stem. From a sheet of green paper she made tiny leaves also, with what seemed to him incredible skill.

For a week before the event Alex maintained an attitude of vast and almost stupid indifference regarding it. Sometimes, to avert suspicion from himself more completely, he spent an evening in the shanty. But the glowing fact remained that he now knew every separate rosebud and bow that would adorn Meggy's box. With his usual shrewdness he realized that other girls might trim their boxes with pink roses, so he took note of each detail during the quick glances he allowed himself.

The news of the social had spread widely. The younger men coming to the coal bank from as far as New Salem mentioned it.

"They've got Lem Patton for auctioneer, I hear, so there's sure to be some fun," they prophesied.

On the evening itself, Meggy in a new blue dress with her box wrapped carefully in plain paper left after an early supper in order to attend to some last preparations at the schoolhouse, for there was to be a short entertainment by the older children before the selling of the boxes. Bill drove her over, remarking dryly that he s'posed she wouldn't have any trouble getting home.

"I wish you were coming, Mother, to see the fun," the girl called back as she left.

"Oh, this kind of thing's for the young folks. Have a good time, dear, and don't be disappointed if all the boxes don't sell. You'll likely have too many," Tirzah cautioned.

Alex bided his time. But later, when the supper things were cleared away, he got some warm water and shaved by the looking-glass on the back porch. He noticed the women exchanging glances, but he said nothing.

He took a long time to his dressing. The new suit had never been worn since that memorable Sunday at church. He donned it now, with the white shirt, red tie and the fine soft shoes. He took out the gray sock from his chest and selected a one-dollar bill from the roll. Then suddenly, without in the least knowing

why, he took a five-dollar bill also, and shoved them both into his trousers pocket. When he came downstairs, Mrs. MacIntosh cried out, and Tirzah stared incredulously.

"Why, Alex! You said you weren't going!"

"Oh, I might juist gie them a look-in," Alex replied carelessly. "Can I drive the gray nag, Mr. Parkinson?"

Bill, who had just returned from taking Meggy, merely grinned and started with him for the shed.

"By golly, Alex, if you ain't the slickest one I ever seen," he said when they were out of earshot. "An' what's more," he added meaningly as they finished attaching the gray mare to the best buggy, "durn me if I don't hope you get what you're goin' after!"

With this blessing Alex departed. He drove slowly, not wanting to arrive too soon. When he came in sight of the school-house, however, he knew that his timing was good. Through the early dusk the small gray frame building glowed from many oil lamps lighted within it. Sounds came from the open windows, too: shrill children's voices raised in song with occasional bursts of laughter and applause. Dozens of buggies, buckboards and surreys were disposed around the school yard, the horses tethered to the rail fence. Alex tied the gray, and then sauntered toward the door. He could see that the seats were filled with the girls, while the space along the walls and the wide aisle at the back were packed with young men standing. In front of the crowd, flushed, obviously nervous, but prettier than ever, Meggy announced her program, prompted the forgetful, drew the curtains for the brief dialogue, and in a clear small voice raised the songs.

While the audience listened with interest and applauded generously there was an irrepressible wave of excitement when the program was over and two men carried a long table from a corner of the rostrum to the center. Upon this were piled boxes of every conceivable shape and color. When Lem Patton, a big, loose-jointed fellow with a quid of tobacco in one cheek, and a

pair of bright roving black eyes in his head, lunged forward through the narrow aisle and took his place behind the table, the crowd clapped and yelled with delight.

Lem, feigning embarrassment, shifted from one foot to the other, grinned foolishly, spat against the rostrum and drew his hand slowly across his mouth. When he finally gave a signal the noise stopped, and in a slow drawl he began his introduction.

"This here," he said, "is certainly a big evenin' fur me. I been auctioneerin' round here fur goin' on ten year, an' I've sold everything from a bull to a bedstead, but this here's the first time I ever auctioneered off pretty young ladies! 'Cause you know, boys, this lunch business is just to fool you. The real idee is that the name of your future wife's in these here boxes!"

There was prompt outcry from the girls.

"No! No! Isn't he awful! Lem, that's no fair! Take that back now!"

Lem looked innocently mystified.

"Ain't that so? Well now, I just took it up wrong, I guess. Anyhow, boys, all I gotta say is, when you get one of these boxes just make the most of your opportunities!"

Loud laughter from the men.

"Now we gotta get started, so s'pose we lead off with this here one." He picked up a neat-looking box draped with a large yellow bow.

"Now, young gentlemen, ain't that a beauty! Got weight to it, too. Pound cake in this one. Yes, sir! What am I bid? Speak up, boys!"

"Ten cents!"

Lem looked stricken.

"He must mean ten dollars! Gentlemen, now we gotta talk business here! We ain't givin' nothin' away tonight! Ten cents! All right, I'll take the bid. We gotta start somewhere. Ten cents I have. Who'll go the twenty? Ten cents I—"

"Twenty."

"Right. Movin' slow an' steady, you see. Twenty cents I have who'll go the thirty? Twenty cents I have—"

"Thirty."

"Didn't I tell you? There's some can smell pound cake all right! Thirty cents, go the forty, go the forty, go the forty—*thir-r-r—*"

"Forty."

"Forty, go the fifty! Forty, go the fifty! Forty, go the fifty, go the fifty, go the fifty. Now for this here lovely box you ain't even started to bid yet! Forty cents I have. Who'll make it fifty?"

"Fifty."

"Now we're gettin' somewhere! Fifty I'm bid, go the sixty. Fifty I'm bid, go the sickitty, sickitty, sickitty! Fifty I have, make it sixty, go the sickitty! Don't tell me you're all done, boys. All done at fifty? All done . . . Last call . . . And sold to the young gentleman by the door for fifty cents."

An awkward farm youth of sixteen, blushing crimson, shuffled up the center aisle, deposited his money and retreated with his box amidst the claps and cheers of the crowd.

Lem now spat again behind him, rubbed his hands together and warmed up to his business. There was a barely perceptible gathering in of the loose edges of the crowd. The fun of the evening was now well started. Alex had wormed his way into the corner where, his broad shoulders braced against the wall, he would attract little attention while he peered out over the lesser breed of young fellows in front of him.

The bidding now grew steadily more animated just as Lem's jokes grew more plentiful and personal. When one box finally brought a dollar and a half the whole schoolroom shouted with excitement. Alex, standing silent and tense, watched the pile of boxes decreasing steadily. He could catch no glimpse of Meggy's. Could she possibly have withdrawn it, thinking there were too many? But just as this fear had thoroughly taken hold of him Lem reached down carefully and then held aloft the rose-be-

decked box. A wave of *oh's* and *ah's* swept over the room. It was by all odds the prettiest that had been offered for sale that evening.

"Now, young gentlemen," Lem began with relish, "take a look at this! If this here ain't something special, I'll eat it!"

At the laugh this brought, Lem amended: "An' that wouldn't be so hard neither! I can smell the fried chicken an' the chocolate cake right through the lid. Look at it, gentlemen! See them posies! Aw, now we're goin' to have some fancy bid-din' or I'm tongue-tied. Come on, now! Come on, who'll start it off?"

"Fifty cents!"

"Fifty cents I have—"

"Sixty."

"Sixty cents I'm bid—"

"Seventy-five!"

"Say, you don't need no auctioneer for this one."

"One dollar!"

"One dollar I'm bid. Make it one-twenty! One dollar I'm bid . . ."

Alex was bidding his time. His plan was not to bid until he had to. He moistened his lips, clenched his hands in his pockets and waited while the bidding went on briskly. At last Lem raised the box a little higher in his hands.

"One dollar and seventy-five I'm bid for this lovely box! Highest price tonight, an' worth it. One dollar seventy-five, make it two dollars! Who'll make it two—make it two—make it two? All in at one-seventy-five? All finished . . . and the last call . . . and—"

"Two dollars!"

Over the heads of the men Alex's voice came strongly—a new voice with a rich hint of accent within it. Everyone turned to look, and Lem Patton, who had heard reports of Alex and guessed now who he was, shifted his quid to the other cheek and girded his loins, as it were, for battle. Ten years of auc-

tioneering had developed in him a curious sixth sense to perceive in the air the moment ordinary competition changed to antagonistic rivalry.

"That's the spirit I like to see! Now come on, young fellers. With this beautiful box in front of you that's got the name of a beautiful young lady inside, who's goin' to stop now? Two dollars I'm bid. Do I hear a quarter? Two dollars I'm bid. Who'll go the twenty-five—"

"Two and a quarter." The voice came sharply from the opposite corner of the room. It belonged to Harry Dennim. All the evening he had stood there glum and silent. For in spite of every sort of blandishment Meggy had refused to give him a single hint as to the appearance of her box. She had indeed for the past two weeks seemed low in spirits and unlike her usual merry self. His final entreaties a few nights before had made her slightly irritable.

"You needn't tease me any more, Harry. I'm not going to tell you anything about it. Nobody is going to know what my box is like. I've told all the other girls not to tell anyone about theirs either."

"But you know well enough they will tell the fellows they're —they're going with."

"I don't care. I'm not going to!"

Harry had been deeply incensed by what he felt was Meggy's heartlessness in this matter. For the past months he had been feeling comfortably sure that he was making progress in his courtship. She had gone out with him as often as he asked her, and while she would brook no infraction of certain rules she had long ago laid down, and would not directly discuss marriage, her manner was all kindness and gentleness; and Harry felt that the ultimate yielding was not far away. His occasional fears in regard to the young Scotchman in the family were always put aside as foolish and below his dignity. He felt the surer of his safety since Meggy never mentioned Alex's name if she could avoid it.

Her refusal to give him the chance he wanted to bid securely upon her box had hurt his pride at its most vulnerable point. Already he could see around him young men who had "steady" girls displaying the names in their boxes with a self-conscious assurance. He felt he would look like a fool in the eyes of all of them if he bought a box other than Meggy's, and so up to now he had steadily refused to bid. As soon as the pink-flowered box had been lifted in Lem's hands, he had thought of Meggy. That was just the sort of thing her dainty fingers would fashion. Yet a whisper from the girls in the back seat had surmised it to be the work of Cora Jenkins of New Salem since she knew how to make paper flowers. So he had let it go by like the others until Alex had called out his bid.

The sound of that voice had stirred Harry almost to a frenzy. It was incredible that Meggy should have told the Scotchman her secret when she had refused to tell him. But it was possible that by some sneaking means he had gotten the information anyway. There was the other dangerous possibility, too, that he was bidding blindly. All this went through Harry's mind in a flash, but the chance to defeat the man he hated and unwillingly admitted in some sense to be a rival, was too fortuitous to be controlled by caution.

"Two-twenty-five," called Harry.

"Two-fifty," came Alex's voice.

Lem beamed. "Two-fifty, boys, I'm bid for the box! Don't tell me there ain't no spunk in young fellers these days. Two-fifty I have, go the sev—"

"Two-seventy-five," from Harry.

"Three dollars!"

The crowd had turned in their seats now, watching breathlessly the battle that was being waged. Over their heads came Lem's voice, excitedly cracking jokes and urging the combatants on. When the price reached four dollars there was a wild outcry. The men were taking sides now, too excited to keep still any longer. Above Lem's voice came their shouts.

"Go after him, Harry! Don't you back down!"

"Come on, Scotty! Keep a-goin', keep a-goin'!"

Meggy in one of the front seats could bear no more. With her face scarlet and the tears near, she stood up and shook her head violently at the two bidders. They both saw her, but while Alex's face remained unmoved, Harry suddenly smiled back at her and nodded. He understood! It was not her box after all, and she was trying to signal the fact. So the joke would be on the Scotchman, and *what a joke!* Harry's confidence returned with a rush. "I'll run it up a little more, an' then leave him stuck with it," he thought viciously to himself. For somehow he knew that Alex would never stop now.

"Four-twenty-five."

"Four-fifty."

"Four-seventy-five."

"Five dollars!"

A prolonged gasp could be heard through the room. Even Lem showed his amazement.

"Did you hear that, folks! *Five dollars* I have for this box. Do I hear another bid?"

He looked toward Harry. But Harry suddenly shrugged his shoulders and made a large gesture.

"I'm through!" he said, adding to those around him, "I was just runnin' it up on that fool."

"All in then," shouted Lem impressively. "All finished—and last call—and *sold* to the young gentleman in the corner for five dollars!"

Harry tried to start a yell of derision, but it was drowned in the deafening applause as Alex walked calmly up to the desk, paid Lem his five-dollar bill and came down the aisle with the box, his chin still set and his blue eyes showing fire. There was that in his bearing that caused the hearts of the girls to stir tremulously and made the young men feel that the newcomer's rights had best be respected.

The last few boxes went quickly and cheaply. The crowd

realized that the high moment of the evening had passed. When at last the young men started finding their partners, Alex made his way to Meggy, who still looked flushed and nervous.

"There's some goin' out to their buggies to eat," said Alex. "Would it be cooler outside, think you?"

"Yes," said Meggy, thankful to escape the publicity which had now become hers. "Let's go out."

Once in the buggy, which luckily stood a little apart from the others, Meggy spoke tremulously to the young man beside her.

"Oh, Alex, whatever made you do it?"

"Do you want me to tell you?" he asked, looking down at her steadily.

"No. Oh, no, I mean—I just mean you ought never to have paid all that money!"

Alex's eyes twinkled.

"They do say," he stated soberly, "that them big dictionaries cost an awfu' lot!"

Meggy looked up, and the tension within her suddenly broke. She laughed, a clear merry peal that echoed across the school grounds and struck the ears of Harry Dennim. He waited only a moment more, but long enough to hear Alex's laughter also; then with black bitterness within him he drove home.

But Meggy and Alex laughed on. They did not know exactly why, except that they were together, happy and hungry and young in the April moonlight. They carefully removed the rose-bedecked lid, and then ate ravenously the fried chicken, the slices of Tirzah's white oven bread spread with fresh butter, the home-made pickles, the coconut cake and the sour-milk cookies. They ate it all, their hands sometimes touching as they reached into the box, thereby sending curious electric thrills through their bodies. But they only laughed the more, innocently content with the present hour, the first in which they had been alone as they were now.

When it was all over, Alex helped her straighten up the schoolhouse, put out the lights, and carry the precious cargo of

money to the buggy. Then through the gentle April air with the moon swinging round and white above the treetops they drove back together as Alex had so often dreamed they would do. Even when he turned the horse down the wrong road to prolong the ride, Meggy did not chide him. She only sat listening wonderingly to the man of few words she had known all the year, for Alex was talking. Almost without realizing he was doing it, he began to tell her about Lamson Green and the smiddy; the funny way Lizzie bargained with the fish cadger; and the way Peter Whinnery used to whittle toys for them out of sticks. He described the Lammermoors and the Cheviots and Tibbie's Glen; he told her of his summers as a boy in Galloway, and how he used to part the thick grasses on the moors to find the Communion stones of the Covenanters. He spoke at last of his mother, and Meggy knew then that the innermost seal on his heart was broken.

"It seems easy, tellin' all this to you," he said once.

When they got home, Meggy waited until he put the horse in the shed, and they went up the walk together. The lamp on the table was burning low, and Meggy turned it up brightly, then hurried to the stairway, suddenly embarrassed by the intimacy of the familiar kitchen.

"It's been a wonderful evenin', Meggy," Alex said.

"It has been—lovely," Meggy answered very low.

And so Alex watched her as she stood posed on the lowest stair step, all golden and shining—watched her as a young man looks at his beloved with all his pride and joy in his eyes; and not even the Galloway blood of his mother which ran in his veins hinted of evil portent or warned him of what was to happen on the morrow.

The next day was Saturday and proceeded as any other day. Alex's thoughts as he worked at the bank wandered frequently to the night before; and every so often he drew a long breath of sheer happiness. He had never been so happy. He sang snatches of old songs, and shouted jovially to the other men. "If Mother

could hae a look at me the noo, she'd be sayin' I'm in fine fettle," he thought, smiling to himself.

At four o'clock they stopped work, the other men taking the road and Alex striking off across the fields toward the house. In a few minutes more he would see Meggy. She would have been telling them all about the social and what happened there. Bill, he knew, would be pleased, and he hoped the women would be also.

He came to the fence, threw himself over, and was crossing the old barnyard when a man stepped suddenly into view. It was Harry Dennim, and he had evidently been waiting for him. Alex was startled, but the triumph of last night made him square his shoulders and start to pass him by.

"Hello, Dennim," he said carelessly.

The smile on Harry's face was not pleasant.

"Just a minute, Scotty, I've got a few things to say to you."

"Get on with it, then," said Alex; "but my name's MacTay if you please."

"Oh, *all* right, MacTay, though I don't give a damn what your name is. So you think you were pretty smart biddin' against me last night?"

"It was you that bid against me," Alex retorted. "You never started in till after I did."

The quick logic of this left Harry speechless for a second, then his brow knit ominously.

"What I want to know is, did Meggy tell you that was her box? I'm goin' to get to the bottom of this with both of you."

Alex thought fast. The truth would spare Meggy from any unpleasant explanations to Harry, and so the truth he should have.

"She told me nothing," he said.

"I don't believe it," Harry shouted. "How could you pick it then?"

Alex thought as he watched the man before him that he had

never before hated him as he did that minute; but at any cost Meggy must be cleared from all charge of duplicity.

"I'll tell ye how it was," Alex said, holding himself in check with great difficulty. "I seen her makin' it, that's how I knew."

"She made it in front of you? I don't believe that either."

"Well, you see she didn't know I would be goin' to the social."

"You told her you weren't goin' then?"

"An' what if I did? That's my own business."

"Oh, no, it ain't." Harry's dark face was darker still with anger. "You and I are goin' to have an understanding right now. There ain't room for both of us round here, and if you weren't so thick-headed you'd see that. So you're goin' to clear out."

A cold light like steel was growing in Alex's blue eyes. He tossed his dinner bucket behind him and took a few steps forward.

"Clear out!" he hissed. "I'll stay here till hell freezes over if I feel like it!"

Harry was not shouting any longer. His voice dropped to a low sneer. Each man was slowly measuring the other, limb for limb, muscle for muscle, pound for pound.

"Oh, you will, will you? You sneak! You think if you stay close enough by the tree you may get a taste of the fruit. That's what you're after!"

For a second the real meaning of the words was lost to Alex. Then like an explosion in his brain the ugly insinuation became clear. With one great forward lunge he struck out at Harry. But Harry had planned his campaign cold-bloodedly. It was his calculating intent to arouse Alex to fury and then, when the first attack came, to miss it entirely, thus putting his assailant at a humiliating disadvantage. Watching as warily as a cat for Alex's first blow, Harry bent aside, missed it, and left Alex driven by the force of it to stumble forward and all but fall. When he raised himself his face was white.

"You damned coward! Won't you fight like a man?"

"Sure I'll fight," Harry said with intolerable scorn. "When I get ready."

They closed in then on each other, the stable hiding them from the house. Neither man possessed any real fighting skill; but each had been endowed by nature for a rough-and-tumble battle, Alex with the greater strength, his opponent with the greater agility. Harry, driven by his consuming thirst for revenge, leaped toward his enemy now with a quick thrust that cut a gash above Alex's eye from which the blood spurted blindingly. Elated, Harry followed this with another and yet another. Alex's big body seemed unable to get out of the way while his own awkward, swinging blows were like flails beating the air; for while Harry had been in various fights before, the experience giving him some knowledge, Alex in all his life had never before struck a man.

Harry was sneeringly confident. He circled his enemy, still sizing him up. He realized that his chance lay in dodging Alex's heavy, ill directed blows, and striking him fast from a longer range. In a few more minutes this method should finish him.

But the minutes passed, and Alex showed no sign of being finished. The long months in the bank digging and loading the coal had made his body hard as flint. Though he had reeled once or twice when the impact fell upon his face, he had straightened and, grim with determined fury, had renewed the battle.

Suddenly now he lashed out and caught Dennim full on the chest. It was a heavy blow and Harry gave a gasp of pain. For the first time his eyes showed fear. His breathing was not so regular now, while Alex's seemed no more labored than after the first encounter. Once more his powerful fist found its mark, and Dennim staggered.

It was here that Bill, approaching from the fields, caught sight of the combatants and with a warning shout started to run toward them. At almost the same moment, Tirzah and Meggy, coming to the stable to do the milking, saw the scene, now

gruesome enough, and cried out in their fright. But neither Alex nor Harry heard the sounds. Instead they heard the beat of the blood in their ears as they gathered their forces for the last struggle.

Harry, with the fear growing in his eyes, determined to risk his last strength on a furious burst of blows which fell on Alex's battered face. But in doing so he got too close. For over him towered a figure terrible to look upon and impossible to escape.

With his fair hair smeared from the grime of the coal and the blood from his bruises, and his blue eyes—what could be seen of them—cold as steel, Alex clutched Harry's shirt with one hand and with the other struck a sledge-like blow full in his face that sent his body sprawling to the ground.

Alex took a few unsteady steps backward, but Harry lay still, apparently without life or breath, a long cut near the temple staining the ground beside him. Bill ran to him, knelt down, shaking him gently, and then lifted the head that fell inertly back.

"Water," he called hoarsely to the terrified women. "Water, quick!"

From where he stood, still half dazed, Alex could see that Meggy was sobbing as she ran.

Bill suddenly raised himself, his face convulsed with fear.

"Alex, you've killed him!"

"I hope to God I have," said Alex thickly.

Then, turning his back, he slowly and heavily started toward the path that led to the spring. His head was dizzy, his eyes blurred, and his legs were unsteady. One arm felt useless, and the raw bruises on his face pained unmercifully. He did not think beyond the urgency of cold water. He stumbled down the slope and gained the spring. Stooping with difficulty, he caught up great dipperfuls from its cool depth which he drank like a thirsty animal, pouring some of the water now and then over the top of his head; then he sat down on the bench beside the

spring and waited until he could feel his senses slowly clearing; until he could see at last the picture of the scene he had just left. He sat here for what seemed to him a long time.

Then suddenly he heard cries and the sound of running feet. He raised his head, wonderingly. It was Meggy calling, hurrying down the path. Her face was stained with tears, but there was a great happiness upon it. Alex felt blinded by it.

"Alex," she cried, "he's not dead! He's come to! Father's going to take him home. Alex, do you hear me? He's not dead!" She was one great burst of joy.

"Oh, thank God he's alive!" she went on. And the tenderness in her eyes smote Alex like a sword.

"If you'd killed him, Alex, I—I think I'd have died too!"

Alex did not speak. He got slowly to his feet and, without looking again at Meggy, began to climb the path. At last he knew the truth after the long months of doubts and half-certainties. He had it now from Meggy's own lips without asking the question he had carried in his heart since that first day. She loved Harry. The sight of him lying as though dead had wrung the confession from her. Meggy loved Harry.

There was no measure for the depths of Alex's despair. He knew only that it was absolute, and that in the same degree his action now must be final.

He gained the house and painfully climbed the stairs. In the small room that he had called his own he sorted his possessions. He did not change the clothes he wore, but he put his new suit and its accessories back into the box. This he would take with him. From his chest he took the gray sock that contained his savings and stuffed it into his pocket. He stood still for a moment, breathing hard; then he reached down to the bottom of the chest to find the Bible his mother had given him, and from it drew the paper upon which he had outlined his plans for his first years in America. He looked at it as through a mist, then tore it into a thousand pieces and threw it from him. Catching up the box, and his best cap from a nail, he went downstairs.

No one was in the kitchen except old Mrs. MacIntosh, who sat muttering to herself in the corner.

"Where are you off to now?" she asked Alex sharply. "Haven't you had about enough excitement for one day?"

Alex made no answer. He went out the door and through the orchard so that he would not have to pass the stable, and finally found himself on the main road; but it was hard going, mile by mile, and he sat down several times under a tree when his legs took to shaking violently. It was dark when he saw the lights of Greensburg, dark as he traced his way through the streets, and darkest of all on the musty-smelling stairs that led up to McKelvey's office. A light showed through the transom, and Alex knocked at the door. When McKelvey opened it, Alex stumbled in and sank down in a chair, the last ounce of strength gone out of him.

McKelvey took one look at the disheveled figure still in his mine clothes, at the bruised, drawn face and swollen eyes; then he opened the lower drawer of his desk with a quick movement and took out a bottle and a tumbler.

"Here, take a drink, lad, and pull yourself together," he said. "Will you have some water in it?"

"Neat," Alex said thickly, and reached unsteadily for the glass.

When he had drained it McKelvey sat back in his swivel chair and studied him with anxious brows.

"What's the matter, Alex?" he said quietly. "What's happened?"

"I've been in a fight."

"With whom?"

"Dennim." Alex spat the word.

"What started it?"

"He said something I wouldn't foul my mouth repeatin' to you."

"Did you knock him out?"

"Aye." Alex's eyes lighted for the first time. "Aye, I knocked the hindsights off him!"

McKelvey smiled but soon grew grave again.

"And then what happened?"

Alex sat silent. He looked suddenly, McKelvey thought, like a wild animal caught in a trap.

"I've left," he said at last. "I'm not goin' back."

"Oh, you'll feel better about it in the morning," McKelvey said calmly. "You can stay here with me tonight. My bedroom's just back of the office. I've got a couch there you can use. These young men's troubles blow over, Alex. Don't take it too hard. Besides you couldn't walk out on the Parkinsons. They've been kind to you, and your coal bank's a big success. You're just beginning to—"

And then he was stopped by the finality of the misery in the face before him.

"You can be savin' your breath," Alex said, "though I know you mean it kindly. I'm never goin' back. All that"—and suddenly his voice broke—"all that's behind me now."

CHAPTER IV

WHILE Alex had declared that he might as well sit up in the office chair, for he would not likely be sleeping anyway, it was McKelvey who lay awake that night long after the youth on the couch had been breathing with heavy regularity. The old man had questioned him no further; instead he had disappeared beyond the bedroom and turned on a faucet. In a few minutes he was introducing Alex to his first bathtub.

"One of my few luxuries," he explained as he laid out soap and large, heavy towels. "I've thought out the answer to a good many knotty problems lying in this tub. Now go ahead and soak the soreness out of your bones."

He was wise enough to surmise that the worst soreness was in the heart, but he could do nothing now about that. He did go down the stairs and through an alley to the back of a certain restaurant where he cajoled a plate of hot food from the cook and brought it back with him.

When Alex, cleaner than he had been since he left Lamson Green, sat at the office desk eating the supper, McKelvey expected that little by little the whole story would come out. According to his experience, young hearts eased themselves of their burden when the body was made comfortable. But it was not so in this case. Alex finished his food, and then sat silent, his blue eyes under their bruises fixed in their pain, his set lips unrevealing.

Before he lay down on the couch he hesitated, then held out his hand to McKelvey. His voice sounded husky.

"Thank ye for your kindness. I don't know where I'd have gone tonight if I hadn't had you to come to."

"There's always a place for you here, lad. Just remember that."

But McKelvey could not rest in his own high walnut bed, which had known three generations of love and birth and death and now held his thin, celibate frame with a kind of austere dignity as though after supporting the turbulence of many emotions it now rested too.

He lay, listening to the dim roar of the trains, and the occasional hoofbeats of a horse on the pavement, and thought deeply about the young man who lay asleep so near to him. He had no doubt that the fight had been caused by some remark concerning Meggy; but why Alex, the victor, should have left the place in bitterness of spirit, he could not figure out. Bill, he was sure, would stand by the lad in any situation; the older women, too, while they might voice their disapproval of the fight, would never send him away weary and supperless. It must be from Meggy herself that Alex was fleeing. And this meant that he loved her; and, more tragic still, that she preferred Dennim. While this latter fact—if it was a fact—seemed incredible, yet McKelvey well knew that a woman's love follows no law. Meggy and Dennim, of course, had known each other from childhood; they shared the same experiences and the same memories—a strong bond. He was a good-looking young blade with a rich farm at his back and fast horses of his own to drive. He had even had a year at college, which set him a thought above the other young farmers. But even so, when she measured the two men for themselves alone, how could she fail to love Alex? Strange, strange the ways of the heart.

But over and above this disturbing problem was one still more pressing. What was Alex to do now? All the ability which McKelvey had that first day posited in the young Scotchman had proved in truth to be there. His success in managing the small country coal bank had been phenomenal. Was he now ready for still greater opportunity? And if this was so, to what degree was he, McKelvey, ready to back him?

About dawn the occupant of the walnut bed also fell asleep, but not before he had come to the momentous decision that, come what might, he would pin his fortunes to the youth who had been sent by Fate to his door.

In the morning McKelvey rose and dressed quietly while Alex slept on, exhausted. It was noon before he woke, to find one eye swollen shut and his limbs stiff and unmanageable.

"I canna go outside lookin' like this," he lamented.

"You don't need to. I'll fetch some dinner back with me and a bit of raw meat for that eye. Then this afternoon we'll talk over some business."

But McKelvey did not have to broach the subject he had in mind. Alex did it for him as they sat by the desk with the mild April air blowing through the window.

"I want to be pushin' on now to something bigger," Alex said. "I've learned a muckle about a coal bank. I'd like to get work at a real mine. But not round New Salem," he added hastily. "I've got to get away."

McKelvey drew the brass spittoon nearer to him and then leaned far back in his swivel chair, his hands behind his head, his eyes fixed keenly upon Alex.

"As I told you once before," he said, "I think the coal's the thing, in this part of the country, and furthermore the way to get rich, I've noticed, is to work for yourself."

"Aye," said Alex. "It is, that."

"I've been wondering if you couldn't buy, say, a hundred acres of coal land somewhere and start up a mine on a bigger scale. Sell to the farmers first, maybe, to get started, but as you get organized, begin shipping. I've an idea you could handle it."

Alex looked at him in amazement out of his one good eye, for the tradition of hereditary ownership of land was ingrained in him from his birth.

"Me buy a hundred acres of land!" he exclaimed. "Are you pullin' my leg?"

McKelvey laughed. "You're in America now, Alex. Land is

plenty and fairly cheap. There are farms that can be bought for twenty-five dollars an acre, all underlaid with coal. As for the money"—McKelvey shifted his glance to the ceiling—"I've a little laid past me that's not working very hard. I believe I could stake you!"

For the first time that day Alex smiled.

"You're a wonderfu' man, Mr. McKelvey, an' mind I'll never let you regret this! Where would these farms be now?"

"Oh, anywhere from five to fifteen miles from here."

"You don't mean nigh-hand to—to where I've just been?"

"No, the other way. Toward Connellsville."

Alex drew a long breath like a sigh.

"That'll do fine then. When can we start lookin' for the land?"

"Tomorrow, if you're able."

"Aye. Let's make it tomorrow. I like to get on wi' a thing when it's begun."

The next morning, McKelvey in his silk hat and Alex in his best suit and cap walked up the street once more to Coshey's livery stable and secured a rig. Alex's face still looked the worse for the fight, but the swelling had gone down from the eye and his clean red blood had done quick work at healing.

As they drove along, McKelvey outlined his plan.

"The farmers," he said, "are getting a little suspicious of the big coal men. They think maybe they're being taken in and ought to get bigger prices for their land. Now our trick is going to be this. You're just a young farmer, Alex, wanting to buy a farm, see? I'm a lawyer along to attend to the legal side, you understand. You'll buy the coal, of course, too, just on general principles, but you're not interested in that at the present. Not till you get it, that is," McKelvey added dryly.

Alex looked at him admiringly.

"Aye, there's more than one way of skinnin' a cat," he remarked.

"Exactly. Now we're going first to see a man down over the

hill that knows more than I do about the farms round here. He's under a little obligation to me—I saved his neck once—so I sort of think he'll help us."

They drove up close to a field where a grizzled little man was ploughing. Upon recognizing McKelvey he stopped his horses and came over to the fence.

"Mornin', McKelvey."

"How are you, Bates?"

"Oh, can't complain."

"Good weather for the ploughing."

"Yes, hain't been bad these last weeks. Whoa there!" he called to the horses.

"Good little farm you've got here."

"'Tain't bad."

"Family all well?"

"Yes. Can't complain, none of us."

There ensued then a silence while each man chewed his tobacco thoughtfully, with the farmer calling out an occasional sharp "Whoa!" to the team.

Finally, the time being psychologically ripe, McKelvey began upon his errand. Alex sensed that somehow without words there had been conveyed the fact that a secret matter would now be presented and was to be respected as such.

"Know much about how the coal lies round here, Bates?"

Bates looked off over the hills.

"Well," he said at last, "I might know a little." There was another brief silence, and then, "What you want to find out?"

McKelvey leaned forward.

"We want to pick up a farm with a good vein of coal under it, 'bout a hundred acres in all—not too far from the railroad. What's the prospect?"

Bates shoved his straw hat back on his head and put one foot on the fence rail.

"Well," he said, "from the Henry Wilson farm on right through, there's coal. You can't go far wrong. Just depends on

who wants to sell and who don't. Wilson now might be willin'. He's gettin' on in years, an' his son don't take to farmin'. I'd try him first."

"Whose place lies next to Wilson's?"

"Jenkins joins him on the north side, an' Barnwall on the south. Dunno about either of them. Won't do no harm to ask."

"You're sure about the coal?"

"Sure. It's outcroppin' all over Henry Wilson's hills. Big seam runs through there, some surveyors told me onct. Just catches me in one corner field, though."

McKelvey gathered up his reins.

"Bates," he said, "this young fellow here, Alex MacTay, is out lookin' for a farm to buy. He's not interested in coal. That's all you know about it."

"Sure," Bates agreed with a slight grin. "I never know much when folks ask me."

"Well, thanks, Bates. We'll move on."

Bates nodded good-bye and returned to his team. The other two proceeded on their way.

It was nine o'clock when they turned in the road to the Wilson farm. By eleven they had walked all over it, shrewdly noting the outcrop and the lay of the hills, McKelvey as spokesman had hinted at a price, worked Wilson up to the selling point and then calmly announced that they would have to think it over for a few hours as they had other farms in view. Wilson walked to the lane with them, by that time eager to close negotiations.

They drove around the curve of the road, and McKelvey stopped under a tree.

"Of course," he began, "we could take an option on this place until we're surer—"

"What's an option?" Alex asked.

"Why, it's a sum of money—say fifty to a hundred dollars—that you pay to hold a deal open to you for six months or a year. Any time during that limit you may buy the property at

the price agreed upon, but no one else can. If you don't buy, the farmer keeps the option money."

"Aye. I see how it works."

"In this case, though, I'm sure this farm is what we want. The coal is here. The land lies well. It's near enough to Greensburg for us to come back and forth easily, and it's not too far from the railroad to hope for a siding. It's not every farmer now that's in the mood to sell at a moderate price. Wilson wants cash, and I can give it to him. What do you say, Alex?"

"Should we hae a look at the farms touchin' on this one, think ye?"

"It would do no harm, I suppose."

They finished the lunch McKelvey had brought, and then drove to the Jenkinses'. There was no discussion here, as the family had no interest in selling. The Barnwall situation was different. This farm was apparently the geological as well as geographical continuation of the Wilson fields. There was outcrop here also, and the remains of a former coal bank. Alex walked silently about, looking across to the Wilson hills. Barnwall said he was holding his farm for fifty dollars an acre. "Or more," he added largely, "if somebody starts after the coal."

McKelvey expressed himself with finality in regard to this price and then went to the house to have a chat with old Mrs. Barnwall, who had known his mother. Alex and the farmer continued to walk through the fields. Once the latter went hastily to the kitchen and back, but when McKelvey was finished with his visit, Alex and Barnwall were standing, impassive, by the buggy.

McKelvey was in good spirits as they drove off. "The Wilson farm's the one, Alex. We'll get back there and close the deal. It's like a leading of Providence that we found it the first crack and can settle it up today."

"Aye, it is that," Alex agreed. "I hope the old codger hasna changed his mind."

But Wilson had not. A cash offer at a fair price for the farm

that was becoming a burden in his declining years was from his standpoint also a direct gift from heaven. McKelvey, spreading his papers on the kitchen table, made out the deed, carefully explaining the technical terms to the old man.

That night back in McKelvey's office, Alex spoke suddenly, and with obvious embarrassment.

"There's something I ought to be tellin' you," he said, "an' I hope you won't be takin' it amiss."

McKelvey in a state of general satisfaction over his own skill in the day's transactions, smiled at the young man with affectionate condescension.

"All right, Alex. Go ahead."

"I took a year's option on the Barnwall farm."

"You what?" McKelvey's feet came down with a clatter from the comfortable altitude of the desk.

Alex did not finish. "If things go well, we're goin' to be needin' that coal; an' by then, when he sees what we're at, he'll push his price up. I got him down to thirty-five dollars the acre as it is. I paid for the option wi' my own money," he added.

McKelvey still stared at him incredulously.

"Your own money?"

"Aye. What I saved from the coal bank. I had it along wi' me."

"But why didn't you tell me? You would need me to draw up the paper!"

"Na, na. That would have spoiled things. You see, he thinks I'm goin' to farm an' was doin' this ahint your back because I like his place better than the Wilsons'. He fetched me paper an' ink from the house, an' I wrote out the thing there in the buggy shed. I hope it's all right."

Alex drew a folded piece of cheap tablet paper from his pocket and handed it to McKelvey, who read this:

Today, April 26, 1891, I received from Alexander MacTay the sum of \$75.00, option money and so I promise that any time

between now and a year from this date this Alex MacTay can buy my whole farm of 120 acres for thirty-five dollars an acre and if he don't buy it within the year I get keeping the \$75.00 option money.

(Signed) JAMES A. BARNWALL

McKelvey stared at the amazing document before him. For forty years he had been skillfully manipulating legal phrases; and here under his nose was a simple statement, clear as water, tight as a drum. It would stand in any court of law.

He was speechless for so long that Alex was fearful.

"You're not offended wi' me, sir?" he asked.

And then McKelvey smiled at the youth across from him a little sadly, while he muttered some words to himself. "*Aquilam volare doces*. I'm only afraid, Alex," he added, "that you're not going to need my advice or my help much longer. I may be teaching an eagle how to fly."

During the next weeks, while the final transfer of the property was taking place and the Wilsons were leaving the farm, Alex was at loose ends. The restlessness of physical inaction was as nothing compared to the restlessness of his heart, which now seemed to be without anchor. Not that his love for Meggy was in any wise diminished. But where before his mind had dwelt upon her with continual delight, he now thrust each thought of her aside in the hope of easing his pain. He felt that, if he once allowed himself to realize the full measure of his loss, he might go mad.

So he busied himself for some days writing letters to his mother and Lizzie and Mr. Whinnery. He even dropped a short note to each of his brothers—a thing he had been meaning to do ever since he reached America. He read steadily, too, as he would use an opiate. He went through Scott's novels like fire in a stubble field; he browsed in John Stuart Mill to McKelvey's secret amusement and pleasure, and conned the pages of the newspapers avidly. Having discovered that McKelvey was a Re-

publican, he promptly espoused that party without reservation.

"I thought they was crooked ones mebbe, them Republicans, from what I was readin' in Mr. Parkinson's paper," he said.

"It's the greatest party in the country," McKelvey replied. "Bill's a Democrat, so you just got hold of the wrong paper there." He paused and then pointed to a steel engraving that hung on the office wall. It showed a tall, gaunt man in a long black coat standing beside a table. His face was homely, lined, majestic, and unforgettable.

"There," said McKelvey reverently, "is the greatest Republican of all."

He talked then of Lincoln while Alex stood scanning the features in the picture. He spoke as an older man does who shares his idol with a youth he loves. Alex said little then, but he kept returning to the subject. So it came about that for several evenings they traced the great political campaign of '61, and fought the battles of the Civil War over McKelvey's littered desk. Alex found it all absorbingly interesting, for not only had McKelvey lived through the history in question but he possessed a terse, vivid narrative style that stripped the great facts of all superfluity and left them bare and alive before his young listener. Alex forgot his heartache temporarily as he fixed his attention on the conflict of the states and the tragedy of the lost leader.

"I'll be gettin' a one of them pictures some day," he said. "I like the looks of the man."

Once when McKelvey asked Alex if he cared for poetry, the youth's attitude puzzled him. For Alex did not reply at once. Instead he looked off to the bookshelves with a strange wistful expression.

"What have you got?" he asked slowly.

"Oh, a little of everything. Your own Burns and Scott, Shelley, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Poe—"

McKelvey stopped. Alex's face looked like that of a man struggling against a mighty temptation. Suddenly he straightened his

shoulders and spoke with an abruptness which the conversation did not warrant.

"I canna be bothered wi' poetry," he said. "I must be gettin' on wi' the coal plans."

The very next morning he set off from the town on foot in the direction of the settlement of red houses he had passed through with McKelvey on his first day in Pennsylvania. This town he knew now was Rockwell, where a large mine had been in operation for years. He walked briskly through the fresh April air, his eyes fixed on the road ahead. The exercise relieved the tension within him, and a definite purpose lay at the end of his journey. He was going to see for himself how a big mine was run.

Once he paused and looked about him. The lordly hills towered, the green woodland marched across the edge of the sky, the brown fields near at hand were warm and rich with germinating life. Alex drew a long breath. A wave of intense emotion swept him. He had a sudden impulse to leap the fence, to cross the fields and reach the farthest hilltop. If he yielded, would it be now as it used to be, back in Lamson? Would his thoughts become a stream of images, with the phrases forming in his mind as though born of the beauty around him? Slowly, with a delight that was half pain, would he cause sentence upon sentence to emerge even as his father Hendry wrought the transient fire of the iron into permanence?

He stood still in the road while a blackbird whistled and the crows cawed high above the ploughed field. But this time the warring within his members was brief. He straightened his shoulders and set out toward Rockwell.

Perhaps, though, because of this moment his first feeling as he approached the town was revulsion at its unsightliness. At the Parkinsons' the coal bank had been a thing apart. The wide-spreading farm had maintained its comeliness and dignity, as though merely tolerating the black desecration of its one hillside.

Here, all was different. The coal industry had its way, pushing back the old fields with arrogance, and rearing its ugly, dark structures where once the meadow grass had blown.

There, beyond the railroad, lay the "patch": rows of small smoky red frame houses, with foreign-looking women in full petticoats and bare feet working about the flimsy porches or carrying heavy buckets of water from the common pump in the street. Here and there a man, presumably a night worker, could be seen at a bench by the back door, stripped and black to his waist, splashing with soap and water in an inadequate tin wash basin.

Alex surveyed the patch with care, noting the cheap construction of the houses and the amount of yard space allotted to each. Before too long he would be needing to know about that.

He turned in the direction of the heaviest smoke, a faint sense of inadequacy for the first time coming over him. The tall tippie, the washer, the lamp house, the offices, with the rows of burning coke ovens stretching far beyond, all spoke of a highly intricate and organized industry. As against this the country coal bank had been child's play. Alex set his lips and plodded on through the heavy dust and cinders.

"I can do as much as any man and mair than most," he thought. "I'm no' goin' to take a backspang now."

As he turned the corner of a rough frame building he bumped into a short, thickly set man with bright blue eyes and a sooty blond stubble on his chin who was hurrying around the same corner from the opposite direction.

"Watch out where you're goin'!" the stranger said sharply, rubbing his nose. "You give me a dod on the neb there."

"Aye," Alex responded. "I give mysel' a bleach, too."

Then they eyed each other keenly and immediately shifted their gaze, as Scotchmen will.

"How long over?" the older man asked abruptly.

"A year."

"Where from?"

"Close to Berwick."

"Huntin' a job?"

Alex's face was blank.

"Well, I'm havin' a look round."

"Where you been workin'?"

"On a farm nigh-hand to New Salem. But I quit."

"Look ye," the stranger said, lowering his voice, "I'm foreman here. There's good jobs round a mine an' I'm scunnered with these garlic-eatin' hunkies underfoot everywhere. I could find you a berth here if you're wantin' it."

Alex's face was still a mask of youthful innocence.

"Could I be lookin' round a bit an' see the workin's of a mine afore I decide?"

"Sure. You can't work intelligent till you know the whole layout of the thing. If you stick with me for a day or so, an' keep your eyes open, you'll know more than you'd ever get from these leather-bound minin' books they're puttin' out. The Super here has them. He reads an' reads, an' then he comes wi' his nice little book to me an' he says, 'Gilly,' he says, 'what's the meanin' of this?' Good chap, the Super, but he didn't work his way up from the diggin' by a long shot. All he knows about stinkdamp, for instance, is that we ain't never had it here. God, I smelt it when I was twelve years old back in the mines in Scotland. Seen men dead of it—plenty of 'em."

Alex was watching him, fascinated. The little man now shook himself with a peculiar muscular contraction of his thick shoulders like a dog, as though to rid himself of certain memories.

"Well," he said briskly, "I've got business in the office. Wait here, an' then you can be makin' my rounds with me."

In ten minutes he was back and led the way toward the darkness of the pit mouth.

"My name's Gilfillan," he threw over his shoulder, "but they call me Gilly."

"Mine's MacTay," Alex responded briefly.

"Thank God for the sound of a Christian name," Gilly an-

swered. "Come on now, an' I'll show you what's goin' on underground."

Alex, according to his nature, did not give a thought to the fortuitous circumstance under which his real education in mining was now to begin. He accepted it without either wonder or gratitude. It was to him but the natural result of his own intense purpose and desire. With a quick intake of fresh air in his lungs, he plunged after Gilly into the black dusk with its strange moist, musty, carbon smell.

They walked along beside the track, Alex noting carefully the structure of the main entry, Gilly commenting as they went.

"Step in this manhole!" he shouted once. "The trip's comin'."

A deafening, rattling roar approached, and the long string of filled coal wagons passed them at high speed.

"What runs them?" Alex asked breathlessly, thinking of the old gray mule emerging leisurely with his burden from the country bank.

"We use rope haulage. One end's wound round a big drum turned by steam power. The other end's fastened to the trip. Come on. We turn off here. This here's Face Entry Number 1."

As he followed, Alex found the new sense of inadequacy increasing within him. Indeed, it would have been fright if he had not set himself resolutely against it. For here before him lay a subterranean city, subject to a definite and masterful design.

"These here face entries," Gilly was explaining, "run off at right angles from the main entry. Then off them run the butt entries, an' off them is the rooms."

He had turned again and was clumping along another passage damp and pungent with the smell of coal.

"I know what rooms are," Alex said.

"Sure. We run 'em off the butt entries like this. I'll show you. You dig in about thirty feet; then you widen her out. That leaves a solid stump of coal at the mouth of each room for support. Then go ahead an' run your room back three hundred

foot. Between rooms you leave a strip of coal about twelve foot wide for support. Them's what we call the ribs."

"Don't you ever dig them out then?" Alex asked. "It seems an awfu' waste of coal."

"Sure. When you get your rooms dug out, you go back an' draw your ribs an' let 'er cave in ahint you. Ticklish work if you don't watch what you're doin'."

"Aye," Alex agreed soberly.

With a terrible concentration that seemed to strain both brain and body, Alex looked, listened, and noted, during every minute of the long day. When the men stopped work at five o'clock he emerged with the stream of weary miners, begrimed also, shaken with the extent of his new knowledge and that still unlearned.

Gilly parted from him with a hearty liking in his voice.

"Well, do you think you'd like to get into the coal business, lad?"

"I'm thinkin' I would," Alex said, still with guile. The time for candor would come later, for already a mighty resolve concerning Gilly had fixed itself in his mind.

"Come back again, then," Gilly added. "You've got a keen eye an' brains in your head. I can tell that fine. I can use a young fellow like you."

"Thanks," said Alex. "I'll mebbe be havin' another look round wi' you, an' then we can talk business."

Gilly grinned condescendingly at the youth.

"Aye, that's the idea. Look before you leap, an' then take a big jump when you're at it."

When Alex reached the office at last, McKelvey was almost as startled at his appearance as he had been the night of the fight. But he listened intently to the story of the day.

"I've learned one thing," Alex said with the fixed expression on his face which McKelvey knew meant an implacable decision. "I'm goin' to need a man that knows more than I do about this business, an' this Gilly's the one I want."

"Well, you can't get him," McKelvey stated with finality. "You don't need to expect miracles. Do you think for a minute you could pay him what E. B. Rockwell does?"

"I've got to make it worth his while somehow," Alex said doggedly. "I've got to have him."

All that night until near the break of dawn, Alex sat at the desk, fatigue forgotten, poring over the diagrams which he laboriously drew, discarded and drew again. Before he flung himself on his couch he had set down every detail he had learned that day. There was rising within him now like a hunger, an insatiable desire for facts, for information, for the knowledge that had been wrought by painful blow on blow of picks in the dark recesses of the earth. Even as he had glimpsed that day the extent of this knowledge he now confidently foresaw the time when he would have mastered it.

To Gilly's manifest amazement and disgust Alex merely said one night, after almost a week of looking around the mine: "I'll be thinkin' this all over, Mr. Gilfillan. An' I'm obliged to you the now."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Gilly blustered. "So it's all squeal an' no wool, is it, with you? I thought you was a lad that knowed your own mind. Here I'm offerin' you a good chance, an' you're too slow in the uptake to see it. Well, get along with you, then. You've took up a lot of my time for nothing."

"You might be hearin' from me later."

"Aw, be off with you! I've no use for a shilly-shally. You don't know what you want."

Alex merely thanked him again, his countenance unchanged. He knew now beyond a doubt that he and Gilly were men after the same pattern.

On a bright day in May which tore Alex's heart with remembrance of the corn planting a year ago, he and McKelvey drove out to the now abandoned farm, followed by a wagon loaded with tools and implements. The Wilson son, Tim, who did not care for farming, had willingly engaged himself to work at the

mine even while his father had begun feebly to doubt the wisdom of his sale. He was on hand that morning by prearrangement, and the three men went carefully over the fields again, studying the outcrop. Alex gave the final decision as to the point where they would start. Tim supported this by pointing to several ground-hog holes at the entrance to the particular hill.

"That's a good sign," he announced. "My pap always said the ground hog knowed where the coal was. Yes, sir, that's a good sign."

So the new project began. Much of it of necessity was a repetition of what he had done a year ago at the country bank; but this time, without even noticing their beauty, Alex passed by the locust trees.

"I'm goin' to use chestnut posts," he explained to McKelvey. "Gilly says in a big mine they're better than locust, for if the weight gets too heavy on them they give out a creakin' sound, an' it warns the men."

So the chopping down of the chestnut trees, of which there were plenty on the farm, went on. Alex heard them crash to earth without a tremor. With the aid of Tim's heavy arms, he split the wood to his purpose.

Steadily day by day an entry into the quiet hill took form. The sill was laid, the sloping side posts reared, the cross timbers put in place above them, the heavy laging planks fending off the weight of the earth at the sides and the top.

Slowly, relentlessly, it seemed to McKelvey as he watched, the grass-grown hill became a mine. By September another pair of hands was needed. Alex broached a matter that he had been considering.

"I'll think I'll be askin' Pat to work for us steady, if you've no objections. It sends up our expenses the now, but we'll get on the quicker."

"Would he come?" McKelvey asked.

"Aye, would he. I seen him a fortnight back, an' he says it's hard gettin' pay out of his uncle."

McKelvey looked thoughtful. It was his money that was financing the undertaking. Sometimes in the dead of night he lay awake in a kind of cold terror lest in his old age he should know want. He asked himself bitterly in these dark moments why he had staked his whole life's savings upon this youth whom he had known but a twelvemonth. Could he not have found him another ordinary job? Could he not have done a dozen sensible things that would have given the boy a start without gambling his whole life away upon him?

But always in the morning light the spell of Alex's indomitable spirit was cast again upon him. Something latent in himself, all but lost among the years, revived, became active. He felt destiny in this lad as he had once felt it in himself. His fears temporarily subsided, and he walked from the office to the courthouse with his silk hat at a slightly jaunty angle.

He and Alex reckoned expenses now and considered possibilities.

"With the extra man," Alex said, "we can sooner begin sellin' coal to the farmers round, an' that'll carry a little of the expense. I want soon to start buildin' the tipple. An' we've got to get the siding, sir, before long."

McKelvey rumbled his curly hair and drummed upon the desk. As well as Alex he knew that a railroad siding was essential to the undertaking. From the first he had told Alex that he, himself, would attend to the matter. He had done this with assurance, for in anything like expediency, contrivance or strategy the years had made him a master, and although he thought best not to reveal this at once to Alex he knew that the matter of securing the siding lay within this realm.

He had gone to Pittsburgh early in July to "see" Dave Ferris, the division superintendent of the Central Railroad. He had broached the matter delicately, as such things were handled. He had pointed out the usual advantages to the railroad in the additional freight haulage which the new coal mine would give. Together they had discussed the exact point where the switch

would be placed. Ferris had been friendly and entirely non-committal until finally, having led up to it by that circuitous route along which such transactions proceed, McKelvey had intimated that the great expenditure of time and effort on Ferris' part in ordering such a switch to be placed would be considered worth a certain consideration by the new coal company.

Ferris from under inscrutable brows had seemed to accept this honorarium in the time-honored fashion, and McKelvey had departed well satisfied.

"A little oil on the wheels goes a long way sometimes," he had said to himself complacently. The switch had been promised for August 1st, but no sign of it had yet appeared.

"The siding's all settled," he said now. "Just takes a little time, that's all. So get Pat for the mine, and go ahead on your tippie."

As Alex had surmised, Pat was delighted to find a new, steady job. The two young men, so unlike in every particular except their physical strength, got on amazingly well together. While taking orders constantly from Alex, Pat still retained a certain humorous superiority of his own. Upon matters of life he was somewhat of a philosopher, and in knowledge of affairs of the heart he considered himself without peer. He and his Kathleen were just waiting for enough to marry on, and in Pat's optimistic opinion this would not need to be a great deal. The first day he was at the mine he made a discovery.

"An' how's Meggy Parkinson, God bless her!" he asked cheerfully.

"I know nothing about her," Alex answered sharply, "an' what's more, I'm no' interested."

Pat whistled softly, eyeing his friend.

"Now, now, Alex me lad, don't get on your high horse with me. Love an' a sneeze can't be hid, you know. If you'd only been willin' to take a wiser man's advice—"

Alex glared at him, but the genuine concern in Pat's eyes softened his anger.

"Just mind your own business, will you, Pat?"

"Faith an' I've minded me own so well I'll soon be a happy man! An' I'll be after sayin' this, too. It looked to me like all Meggy was waitin' for was just—"

"Haud your whisht!" Alex spoke so savagely this time that Pat did not finish his sentence.

By the end of October the mine had assumed the outward appearance and structure of a big undertaking. There had been the ring of carpenters' hammers as the tipple rose gauntly; a temporary office shack had been built also, and a stable for the mules. Pat, who had a genius for making himself comfortable under any conditions, insisted upon keeping "batch" in the so-called office, thriving cheerfully upon a fare of boiled potatoes and huge loaves of bread bought from a farmer's wife. Alex still stayed with McKelvey, riding back and forth each day. At the beginning he had shown a strong revulsion against the idea of living with a farmer's family near the mine.

"Whatever he's been through," McKelvey reasoned, "he's better here with me than with strangers. Besides, I can keep in touch better with the job."

So a small mustang pony, looking more or less like a gray rat, had been purchased and housed at Coshey's along with a light buckboard. Thus equipped, McKelvey urged, Alex could ride back and forth each day, and he, McKelvey, could drive with him when he was so inclined. People in Greensburg soon recognized the outfit and commented to one another:

"That's the young Scotchman, MacTay, who's running the new mine. Andy McKelvey's backing him, I hear."

"What new mine?"

"The Scotia Coal Company, on the old Wilson farm."

For the mine had been given a name! On one momentous night at McKelvey's desk the articles of incorporation had been drawn up. Alex read over the document McKelvey had prepared, with a strange feeling within him, stronger even than pride. He was on his way to real business, at last.

In all their plans and actual accomplishments there had been only a single hitch, but that a most serious one: There was no sign yet of the siding, and McKelvey had ceased looking assured when it was mentioned. He had made three trips to Pittsburgh, and finally confessed himself baffled. Dave Ferris each time had made fair promises and offered excuses for the delay. But McKelvey knew there was something wrong. Ferris was too suave, too evasive, too ready with words.

One night late in October, Alex came back to the office with an expression on his face that meant trouble.

"We can't go ahead till we get the siding. We're goin' to need machinery an' more lumber shipped in before we're ready to ship out coal."

He paused, looking keenly at McKelvey, and then added, "I'm goin' up tomorrow to see this Ferris man myself."

"No," McKelvey said quickly, "you can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"You might spoil everything. It's been fixed already. We've just got to wait."

"But we can't wait, I tell you."

McKelvey had been pushing his grizzled curls erect upon the back of his head. He knew he would have to give all the facts now.

"You see, Alex, it's like this. Theoretically the railroad ought to put in a switch where we want it for nothing in return for the freight business we'll give them."

"Aye, that's my understandin'."

"But I happened to know there was a little—ah—intermediary step involved. The way you go about it is to see the division superintendent and—ah—sweeten his coffee a little for him, as it were, in return for your siding."

Alex looked puzzled for a second and then angry.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I thought I could manage it better myself."

"You paid him money. How much?"

McKelvey reluctantly named the sum, and then for the first time he heard Alex swear.

"Has he asked for more?"

"No. Seemed perfectly satisfied at the time."

"Then it's as plain as the nose on your face. Somebody's givin' him more to keep him from puttin' in the switch for us."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I'm sayin'. Some of these other mines round here has got wind of us, an' they're tryin' to block us. They know we'll be takin' business away from them. An' as for Ferris, if he takes wi' one hand he'll take wi' the other, won't he?"

"By Jove, you may be right."

"I know I'm right. Who's the man above Ferris?"

"General superintendent—J. P. White. But now, Alex, listen to—"

"Where's his office?"

"Philadelphia. But I tell you it wouldn't be worth my while to go—"

"I'm goin' myself. I'll put the things square up to him."

For a long hour McKelvey argued, and for the first time between them there was a slight acerbity in tone. At the end the earnestness of Alex's face prevailed. McKelvey gave in, though with a feeling of humiliation. He had greatly wanted to carry through the matter of the siding himself. Moreover he felt that the course Alex proposed to take was suicidal. But, right or wrong, he saw it was impossible to stop him.

Two mornings later Alex stood in the presence of the General Superintendent of the Central Railroad, and in a half-dozen closely shorn sentences stated his case. Jonathan White, who had risen to his present position from a hard boyhood spent on a back-country farm in Allegheny County, looked with a peculiar gaze on the young man before him.

"How old are you, MacTay?" he asked with seeming irrelevance.

"Twenty-three, sir."

"And you're starting a coal mine and want the Central Railroad to put in a switch for you."

"Aye, that's right. An' it's not for a favor, mind. We'll soon be shippin' enough coal to make it worth your while."

Mr. White's gaze was so intent that Alex was uneasy; then the official turned abruptly.

"Jack," he said, "look here a minute."

To Alex's surprise another young man rose from a chair by the window and came slowly and gracefully toward them. He was tall, slender, and dressed in riding breeches. When he extended his hand Alex found it slim and soft as a girl's.

"I think it might do you good to meet someone who knows how to work," the older man said quietly. "My son Jack, MacTay. Same age as you."

Alex said nothing, but the youth, Jack, laughed easily.

"Death on work, my father is. Now I don't see why people should work when they don't have to. Leave it for the ones that need it, say I. Take you now."

Alex was conscious of brown eyes both merry and insolent staring hard at him.

"Was your father rich?"

"Nae fears," Alex retorted. "He was a country blacksmith."

"There, you see! You need the work, don't you? I, who might have snapped it up, magnanimously left it for you. Thank me, why don't you, for your coal mine or whatever it is!"

Alex looked puzzled, and Mr. White looked angry.

"That's enough, Jack. He's talking nonsense, MacTay. All right, now, let's settle this matter of the switch."

As he was leaving the office, Alex glanced toward the window. The young man, Jack, was standing there watching him with a lazy interest. He raised his riding crop in a delicate salute to which Alex made no motion of reply. In the hall, however, he became confused and started down the wrong corridor. In a minute he felt a touch on his arm. It was Jack.

"I've had an idea," he began. "You're Scotch, aren't you?"

"Aye."

"Well, they say a Scotchman can carry his own weight in rye. Come on. Let's go prove it!"

"I'm catchin' a train," Alex said shortly.

"You got what you wanted from my father, didn't you?"

"I did."

"Well, that calls for celebration, doesn't it? Jubilation, jocularity, warming cockles, all that sort of thing. I've a feeling that if I were given a free hand I could eventually penetrate that granite exterior of yours and find pulsating beneath it a warm, human heart! Come on! There are more nice little places to drink in this City of Brotherly Love than—"

Alex looked viciously about him.

"Where's them stairs?" he said. "I'm in a hurry to get a train back."

Jack drew a long sigh of apparent resignation. "Ah, well," he said, "if I may not ascend to fame and fortune myself I can at least help send a good man down."

He drew Alex with him along a narrow corridor and around a corner, motioning toward the stairway with an elaborate flourish.

"You're a funny chap," Alex said, for the first time giving his companion a real scrutiny.

Jack shook his head.

"I'm grieved that I cannot return your courteous observation, but I do not find you at all humorous. *Au contraire!* Good day, my solemn sir."

He started back, then returned to lean over the railing.

"If you should ever smile," he called, "send me a wire, will you?"

"I think you're clean daft," Alex replied as he pursued his way to the first floor, immediately forgetting the encounter. In a half-hour he was on the train. So absorbed was he then, in making rough sketches of the course of the siding, that he gave no thought to that first day when, weak and shaken and full of

doubts, he had started from this very station bound for an unknown country.

Alex's casual acceptance of the success of his journey made the whole matter easier for McKelvey's wounded pride. He had now to admit that Alex's perception had been correct just as his grim faith that all material obstacles must of necessity bow before his will had probably impressed the Superintendent and brought about the desired end. At all events the switch was placed the middle of November, and soon after a group of "hunkies" with picks and shovels began work upon the slender line of curving rails that was to link the new mine with the outside world.

Alex was deeply impressed by this. It was as though now that power which he felt within him was to be given a pathway of transmission. No longer need it be forced back into himself. He and his black treasure would fare forth now and meet and mingle with the country's mighty stream of commerce. The shining rails made this a reality.

As soon as the track was laid, Alex knew that he was ready to approach Gilly.

"If he'll take stock for part of his pay, we can manage," he kept telling McKelvey.

"We can't afford it even then, Alex, till we begin to get some returns. But he won't come anyhow. So you might as well save your breath to cool your porridge."

"I've got to have him," was all Alex would say.

His meeting with Gilly was dramatic. When the grizzled little man saw his erstwhile student of mining riding up one late afternoon, he approached him shaking his fist.

"You young sneak!" he began. "Haven't I been ettlin' to lay hands on you! I know what you was up to here. You ought to think shame to yourself. *Information*, that's all you was after! Spyin' round!"

"Aye," said Alex calmly. "That's right."

Gilly stepped back. "You admit it! Well, what kind of a collieshangie are you comin' to stir up now, then?"

"I'm wantin' to see you on business. Where can we talk quiet?"

Alex's tone was determined, and his eyes level.

Gilly ceased blustering.

"Wait till the whistle blows, an' come to my house—the third gray one there ayont the tracks—though I'll tell you now you'll get nothin' more out of me!"

For three hours the Scotchmen talked, slipping back into the rich vernacular and the thick accent of their native village. Gilly's wife, seeing there was no stopping them, set tea and bread and cheese beside them and retired to the kitchen, where she kept the children quiet and overheard all she could.

Gilly's first reaction to the proposition was loud laughter, and an expansive account of how important a man he was at the Rockwell mines. Alex merely agreed with him.

"That's why I'm wantin' you to come wi' me." And each time Gilly paused for breath he went on doggedly setting forth his case.

At the end of one hour Gilly was biting his fingernails and asking questions about the stock. At the end of the second hour he was figuring on the probable output of the Scotia Coal Company for the next two years.

At the end of the third hour the two men rose and shook hands.

"I may be makin' a fool of myself," Gilly said, giving his characteristic shake of the shoulders; "but man, if I wadna like damned well, after all the years grubbin' wi' the coal, to feel I owned a lump or two of it myself!"

Alex's face bore that curious look of intensity and conviction which was always to move men.

"Ten years from now, you'll be blessin' the day you did it!" he said.

He was in good spirits when he got back to Greensburg and poured out his news to McKelvey.

"He's resignin' the first of the month, an' he says he'll be with us by January. It was the stock did it! I thought it would tempt him, but it's a weight off my mind now he's acceptit. We'll be goin' big before long now, sir!"

McKelvey looked tired that night. He had just been going over his own account books and realized again that he had put the work of a lifetime and its returns into the balance against the fate of the Scotia mine. While the progress so far had been both steady and rapid, there still lay before them the problem of marketing their coal and the eternal nightmare of whether the whole venture would ultimately be a success or a failure. The surprise of Gilly's acceptance of Alex's proposition made McKelvey feel his responsibility more than ever.

"*Ante tubam trepidat*," he muttered now, smiling wryly.

"What's that again?" Alex asked quickly.

"Oh, that's just an ancient way of saying my courage oozes out once in a while. We've bitten off a pretty big mouthful, Alex. What if we can't chew it?"

"Na, na," Alex said almost fiercely. "You mustna be down-cast. You're havin' to lay out all the money now, but that'll change soon. We're not goin' to fail, mind. I promise you that!"

McKelvey looked at the face across from him, eager and wholly determined.

"Alex," he said with a wondering admiration, "I don't believe you ever doubt your ability to make life give you everything you want."

Then he could have bitten his tongue out, for Alex's flushed face went slowly pale. He pushed aside the papers before him, picked up his cap without a word and went out.

The accidental remark had opened again the never healing sore of his heart. Through all the summer and fall he had heard nothing directly from Meggy. Bill had been in the office several times, but Alex had always been out when he came. According

to McKelvey, Bill's attitude had been first one of the keenest anxiety as to why Alex had left, and later one of extreme irritability that he had not returned. For the coal bank on the farm was not flourishing now as it had done. In answer to McKelvey's questions Bill always stated that the family were all well and none of them knew a hell's haet as to why Alex would rise up and leave them in the lurch like that, adding always that Alex surely knew that he, Bill, would be only too glad to see the stuffin' knocked out of Harry Dennim any time.

All this, however, had no power to ease the pain in Alex's breast. He could only plunge harder into the new work. But, while he filled his waking hours with unremitting labor, he could not guard his distraught mind in sleep. He dreamed of Meggy: dreams of passion, of beauty, of grief, and all of them torture when he woke and remembered.

He wandered now through the streets, allowing himself at last to think of his love, going over and over all the events of his one bright year with her. He felt again the kiss in the snow, and his body burned with the memory; he felt his pride as he walked up the aisle to claim the rose-bedecked box, and he knew again the tender joy of the drive home that night and the moment of intimacy that fell upon them in the kitchen.

But his mind would not stop there. Inexorably it went on to that last cry of Meggy's by the spring: "If you had killed him, Alex, I think I would have died too!" And after that the black night of his despair.

As he walked on now, he found himself in streets he had never been in before: the streets on the hill with great brick houses and wide lawns. It was a dark night with a clouded sky and a warm, late Indian summer air that pressed upon him like a weight. Sometimes there came from an opened door a burst of voices or the gay tinkle of a piano. He could feel all about him the atmosphere of wealth and comfort which he had determined some day to have for himself—and for her. Behind these dignified walls, back of all these lighted windows, were happy

men, and men enjoying the fruits of their power, living and loving together as he had dreamed he and Meggy would do.

Now he glimpsed it all alone and hopeless under the heavy, unstarred sky.

The fine streets soon ended, and he turned blindly, following alleys and roadways—no matter where, as long as he kept driving himself on, outrunning his grief.

He found himself at last in a poor, thinly housed street, with one frame building apart from the others looming significantly in front of him. He stood still watching. Without personal knowledge, he yet knew by hearsay and by certain present signs that something awaited him here if he would have it. The possibility of a low and transient form of physical consolation entered his mind almost with violence.

But, even as the thought was fully born, he killed it. He was not made to love lightly and for an hour; and because of this he knew that he must bear now what his own nature laid upon him.

"I maun just thole it," he muttered.

He turned about at last and started slowly back to the office, wearied with an unspeakable exhaustion of both body and soul. But as he went on a curious thing happened. The heaviness of the clouds broke, and a fresh breeze began to blow. To Alex's hot face it seemed like the old wind from the North Sea. And all at once he saw again the rich harvest fields sloping down to meet the ocean; he saw the greenness of Tibbie's Glen and the village street; he saw his father bringing the hammer down upon the forge, and his mother curling the tails of the herrin' before she put them in the oven. The old country was closer to him than it had been for many months.

McKelvey was in bed, his face tactfully turned to the wall, when Alex came in. Shedding his outer clothes quickly, Alex threw himself upon the couch; and as he fell asleep, he dreamed not of Meggy but of old Peter Whinnery whittling toys in the corner of the kitchen at Lamson Green.

With the addition of Gilly, work at the Scotia mine moved forward apace. Each man now was getting out ten or twelve tons of coal a day. This was piled at the mouth of the mine for local sale, while within, the entries were driven deeper and deeper.

"I got here none too soon," Gilly fumed one day. "It's nothin' but the mercy of the Lord an' the luck of a lousy calf that kept you all from bein' killed by a fall of draw slate. Just because every lick of the pick brings coal here, you don't need to be thinkin' you can take it all out. This here Pittsburgh vein's about ten feet thick below the draw slate but if you don't leave a couple of feet over your head to hold that slate up you're goin' to get buried in it some day. Yes sir, that's killed more men in mines than stinkdamp or blackdamp or any other kind of damp."

He taught them how to sound the roof with their picks, listening for vibration. If it rang solid they could go ahead; if not, there must be more supporting posts and cross timbers. With an old-fashioned triangle he laid out the barrier pillar, the face and butt entries, then the rooms. Interspersed with his practical and orderly direction were the traditional superstitions of his profession.

"An' I've never known it to fail! Every miner'll tell you the same. It's death for somebody if a woman sets foot in a mine. I've seen men refusin' to go to work when they'd get wind of a one bein' inside. I mind over at the Premium works, where I used to be fire boss, the Super's wife was a gabby body always pokin' her nose round where she had no business, an' she was dead set she was goin' to see the inside of the mine. Her man couldn't manage her. He was a couthy chap too, but no spunk to him. Well, she got up a party one day, an' they all went through the mine."

Gilly paused dramatically. The other men who were eating their lunch at the moment awaited the climax.

"An' the next day, sure as fate, we had a cave-in an' two men was caught. It never fails. I'm tellin' you."

Pat's Irish eyes were large with astonishment.

"Faith, an' it's the first place I ever heard of outside the Garden of Eden where a woman would be bringin' bad luck to it."

"An' I'll tell you something else," Gilly went on. "If you ever see a rat takin' out toward the mine mouth, drop your picks an' run like hell, for there's something bad wrong when the rats leave. Like a ship. Well, lads, come on now. Talkin' won't dig the coal!"

By the following spring McKelvey was the confused victim of the old doubts and fears and a new and inordinate pride. Alex, he discovered, had taken options on three more farms, paying for them out of his own earnings, and was now expecting to take up the one on the Barnwall property. He was shipping out three carloads of coal a week as against one per week in February. He had hired four more men to work in the mine and was already talking about coke ovens. All this was food indeed for pride. But this pleasant elation did not pay the bills. All of McKelvey's small capital was now invested, and they needed more to keep going until the real money began to come back to them. The Barnwall property alone would come to more than five thousand dollars.

"Alex," he said one night, "we've a banking problem on our hands. We've got to get a loan, and I'd rather not ask for it here in Greensburg. E. B. Rockwell happens to be a director in the Merchants' Trust here, and I think it's better for us if he doesn't know all our business. I believe we'll go up to Pittsburgh and talk to Colonel Selden of Selden's Bank. He knows me, and I've still got a piece of property in Salem Township I can put up as collateral. I can get ten thousand maybe on a stretch."

"Aw, that's good," Alex said. "Let's be goin' tomorrow."

"I've got a case on."

"As soon as you can then, let's be gettin' on with it."

When they sat in Colonel Selden's private office, that astute old gentleman listened to the story as told by McKelvey, but watched the younger man as he listened. Comfortably corpulent, shrewd of eye, with a dignity of feature to which his grayish burnsidcs and mustache added, the Colonel passed upon problems of finance and especially upon the men who presented them with a knowledge of human nature gained during four years of war and thirty of banking. He had one of the largest private fortunes in Pittsburgh and could easily have retired from active affairs, enjoying the leisure of his big estate in Sewickley, but he found the manipulating of men and money too interesting.

He noted now certain details in Alex which he always looked for: good eyes, good chin, capable hands; sat easily on his chair, his body still, his features steady. Strength here, he decided, and ability.

"So you need ten thousand, Andy?" he asked.

"I think we do, Colonel. We're in this thing now, and we want to make a go of it."

"I believe we can oblige you. I make one small stipulation."

"Name it."

"I'd like this young man here to bring me in a report every month or so on the way things are going. Will you do that?" he asked, looking at Alex.

"Yes, sir. I'll be verra glad to."

That promise, asked and given, more perhaps than the loan itself, marked an advancement in Alex's career. Up to this time his only contact with a man of better social and cultural background than himself had been his friendship with McKelvey, who though keenly intelligent and grounded in history and the classics still had the social limitations of a small-town lawyer.

Now, in accordance with his regular appointment, Alex sat in the Colonel's private office and conversed with a man who belonged to a different world. With that delicate flair he had in-

herited from his mother of feeling a personality as one would feel the heat or cold of the atmosphere, Alex sensed that the Colonel had been born to the manner and dignity which now clothed him; that from his birth every door had opened to him by right of his being a Selden—like the Laird back at Lamson, for example. He felt the richness of this heritage, augmented by the experiences of a full life. Something in his own nature strained after this consummation of culture and wealth. The goal he had irrevocably set for himself took on an added significance.

The Colonel always listened gravely to Alex's clear, brief report of the Scotia mine, as he presented it month by month. They had bought the Barnwall property which lay directly in line with the Wilson farm. Alex had taken options on two other near-by farms making five options now that he held.

"We've got to be keepin' well ahead of our workin's, you see. We must have plenty room to widen out. I got these last options reasonable by sendin' Tim Wilson out for them. He let on to each of the farmers that he was scunnered at the whole coal business an' was wantin' to go back to farmin'. He let on we'd bit off more than we could chew an' was in bad shape at the mine. It worked all right. There's always more than one way of skinnin' a cat, you know."

The Colonel nodded. "I believe I've heard that same sentiment before, in various forms."

A good coal broker in Pittsburgh had been located, and Alex was finding more markets for his output. They were putting up a row of houses for the workmen—the beginning of a "patch." They were taking on a few hunkies, Slavs and Poles, strong workers when it came to tonnage.

"How do you pay your men?" the Colonel asked once. "By the ton or the wagon?"

Alex's firm lips were touched by a faint smile. The Colonel recognized it. He had seen that same look on the faces of other men of power.

"By the wagon," Alex said. "We save the price of a good few tons a day by doin' that. Gilly has a smart trick too. He makes them pile the coal in a hump on every wagon and then throw their cap on it. If the cap stays, the wagon isn't full enough. He's a fine foreman, Gilly."

At each visit, when the report was over, the Colonel indulged in a few minutes' general conversation. He knew Andrew Carnegie; he had helped Clay Frick get his start; he made mention of them frequently, watching the effect on the young man's face before him. For he had taken a deep interest in Alex. He saw distinctly the iron will, the relentless force of his nature; and once he had glimpsed something else.

"Are you married, Alex?" he asked one day.

"No, sir," Alex said briefly.

"Haven't found an American girl to suit you yet, eh?"

Something passed over Alex's face like a cloud: a sensitivity, a withdrawal, an embarrassment of suffering. The Colonel changed the subject at once, but kept thinking of the matter later when he was alone.

"A lucky girl that gets that young fellow," he thought. Then, as though adding an amendment to his reflections, he sat thoughtful, his brow drawn, for some minutes.

At the end of the summer Pat became insufferably buoyant of spirits. He laughed at nothing, he cracked pointless jokes, he kept singing at all hours a song befitting his state of mind:

"In the town of Kilkinny lived Larry McGee,
Oh, the devil's own boy at divarsion was he;
He'd a donkey, a pig, but he hadn't a wife,
His cabin was dreary and wretched his life."

As the ballad went on, Pat's voice rose to an earsplitting climax after the details of a courtship had been poetically set forth:

"Sure the chickens was roasted, the praties was biled;
They were all in their jackets for fear they'd be spiled;
An' the neighbors came flockin' for to fling up the stockin'
And dance at the weddin' of Larry McGee."

Alex, hearing this song daily and seeing his friend's exuberant spirits, suffered. For Pat was going to be married in October and live in the second house in the new row, next to the one Gilly had selected for his own family.

"An' you're all bid to the weddin'," Pat reiterated jubilantly. "Me Kathleen says to tell you all you're kindly welcome. We'll be married at St. Joseph's Church here in Greensburg at nine o'clock Saturday mornin', the 15th; then we'll be drivin' back to me uncle's for the celebratin'. An' I can promise you plenty to wet your whistles if you come, glory be to God!"

Alex presented to McKelvey a half-dozen excuses of more or less validity for not attending the wedding. McKelvey overrode them all. Alex had a friend's duty to perform to Pat, he pointed out, and so must be there. No business could be allowed to interfere.

On the crisp bright morning of the 15th, therefore, the two men entered a Catholic church for the first time and watched with a Calvinistic superiority and hard-bending Presbyterian knees the intricacies of the service which united Pat and Kathleen. Alex leaned over once to McKelvey.

"A lot of gibberish," he whispered, and McKelvey nodded assent.

But before it was ended Alex glimpsed the sacramental mystery that was making Pat and his bride one flesh forever. And as he did so, the old hunger of his own love rose to the point of torture.

Outwardly he conducted himself casually and well that day. He ate of the country bounty of Jim Crowdey's table, drank freely of the whiskey provided—carrying it, as McKelvey told

him proudly on the way home, like a Scotchman and a gentleman—and wished the bride and groom happiness in a tone almost gay. But, once back in Greensburg in the late afternoon, a painful quiet fell upon him. And as the days and weeks passed McKelvey noticed that the white silence of Pat's wedding night had not left him.

As each month brought added business to the Scotia mine, McKelvey, growing now somewhat more encouraged as far as their venture was concerned, was at pains to repeat to Alex all the heartening news he heard. As a matter of fact there was no man of importance in Greensburg now who did not recognize Alex and speak of him with respect. Colonel Selden in Pittsburgh had definitely stated that he considered young MacTay a coming financier, while E. B. Rockwell had been heard to remark humorously, "If that young Scotch devil keeps on he'll run us all out of business!"

But all these verbal gratuities made no impression upon Alex, and McKelvey, watching the youth as one who loved him, was uneasy in his mind. For clearly now he saw that Alex was changed. It was not only that he was heavier than formerly, with powerful shoulders and thighs; nor that he bore himself with more assurance and had a quick, decisive edge to his voice. It was something in his face that kept McKelvey wakeful at night. For there was a set stillness about the mouth which did not belong to youth, and the blue eyes had no brightness in them now. They were burnt out, cold, like pieces of flint.

The winter passed, and spring came again with its waking beauty and tenderness of young things. McKelvey grew more restless as his anxiety grew more acute. In the face of all advice Alex was again working beyond his strength, for he had attacked a new problem, that of adding coke ovens to the Scotia mine. For many days without McKelvey's knowledge he had driven over to Connellsville and studied the process there, fearing to venture again close to the Rockwell premises. Even while McKelvey urged caution and delay he could see that this new

phase of the coal industry had captured Alex's imagination, and that he had set his will upon it. He talked constantly now of plans to dam the small stream on the Barnwall farm to make a reservoir; of how much it would cost to build a washer; and of where the coke ovens themselves should ultimately be placed. A stranger would have read in Alex's face nothing except a complete concentration upon his business; but McKelvey, loving him, divined that this was in part a mask, for sometimes after they had lain down to sleep he heard a long, heavy sigh from the figure on the couch. At twenty-four, McKelvey reasoned, it was not natural for a young man to fall asleep sighing.

On a warm June afternoon he got up suddenly from his desk, almost overturning his chair.

"I can't stand this any longer," he said aloud. "I'm going to do something even if I get my fingers hurt doing it."

He smoothed his silk hat, set it on his head, then made his way toward the livery stable, stopping once dead upon the street.

"There's no fool like the man who meddles in another man's love affair," he muttered, as though still weighing the matter.

Then he gave the crown of his hat a sharp clap.

"All right. I'm that fool!" And went on.

It was late evening when he returned to the office. Alex was standing before the bedroom window looking out over the summer-clad hills, his hands in his pockets, his head lowered, dejection in every line of his body. For a minute he did not hear McKelvey; then he straightened quickly and came out to meet him. The older man wore a peculiar expression, at once excited and complacent.

"Sit down, Alex. I want to talk to you." His tone was masterful as though once again Alex were the green young immigrant and McKelvey the competent man of affairs.

But when Alex was seated, watching him curiously, McKelvey seemed to find it hard to begin.

"I was out at the Parkinsons' today," he said at last, emphasizing each word.

There was silence.

"And I had a long talk with Meggy!"

Still silence.

"Well," said McKelvey irritably, "don't you want to hear about her?"

"I'm no' interested," Alex said shortly.

McKelvey jumped to his feet.

"Why, you cold-blooded young imbecile! The girl loves you! If you hadn't been so stubborn and proud and pigheaded all this time—"

But Alex too was on his feet now. With a spring he was beside McKelvey, gripping the older man's arm hard.

"What reason have you for sayin' that?" he demanded hoarsely.

"She told me herself."

"You're crazy! She couldn't ha' said it. She loves Dennim. She told me so after the fight!"

And then McKelvey drew a long breath. His last doubt was dispelled.

"Alex," he said, "do you remember exactly what she did say to you then?"

"Would I be like to forget it?"

"If you repeat it to me, I think—as a lawyer—I can clear it up."

Alex hesitated, letting go McKelvey's arm. Then very slowly as though each word was painful, he quoted, "If you had killed him, I think I would have died too."

"Exactly. And you thought that meant she loved Dennim?"

"Why wouldn't I think it?"

"Alex, my lad, did you never stop to consider what it would have meant if you had actually killed your man?"

"Aye. There would have been one varmint less in the world."

"And what about you?"

"I wasna thinkin' of myself."

"Yes, but Meggy was. And while Dennim lay there on the ground she had but one fear. It was that you would have to stand trial for murder." McKelvey smiled wryly. "Even I might have had a tough job getting your head out of the noose."

Alex stared for a moment blankly. Then under McKelvey's gaze his face became transformed. The older man felt a tremor go over him as he watched it, for Alex's eyes were dead no longer. They were shining with the deep light that comes for one reason and one only.

"Are you sure of this, man?" he asked.

"Absolutely. And if I were you I would knock off work tomorrow and go out and see for yourself."

"Tomorrow!" Alex shouted the word. "Div you think I could wait till tomorrow? I'll be goin' the night."

He sprang for his plaid cap that hung on the wall, then grasped the door knob. McKelvey took a step forward. "You can't go now at this hour, Alex. It'll be midnight before you get there. They'll all be in bed, asleep. Be sensible. Wait till—"

"Na, na! I've waited too long as it is. I'll be goin' now as fast as I can make it."

He flung open the door, then stopped, returned, and stood looking at McKelvey. But the words he evidently wanted to say would not come.

McKelvey, understanding, waved him off.

"That's all right. That's all right!" he said. "Go on now if you have to, and may the journey end in lovers' meeting!"

But he stood still in the bare office long after the sound of Alex's feet running down the stairs had died away. For one redeeming moment, through the shine of the young man's eyes he had felt the gray ashes of his own life rekindled and burning. But it was only for a moment. The bright memory perished. He shook himself at last, rumbled his hair and sat down to the desk.

"What a hare is madness, the youth, to leap over the meshes

of good counsel, the cripple!" he quoted to himself, as he settled to the case of McWherter vs. Kelly.

Coshey's livery stable was closed for the night when Alex got there, but he quickly roused the stableman.

"I want the pony out, Henry! I've an errand back in the country."

It was dark when he started, but by eleven the moon rose. With this unexpected aid he rode harder than ever. Even so, it was nearly midnight when he turned the familiar corner of the road which brought the scattered sheds and the farmhouse into view. He tied the pony at the hitching post and started once more up the curving walk that led to the back porch.

The house lay still and asleep, bathed in the white moonlight. Alex felt a mist rise to his eyes at the remembrance of it all, and his heart beat faster at the tender sensation of his own tears.

There was a succession of sharp barks from the collie, until Alex spoke his name; then the great dog jumped upon him with joy, circling about him as he knocked on the kitchen door. Even then, standing alone in the eerie night, rousing the sleeping family at his imperious need, Alex saw nothing strange in his conduct. To his mind it was only logical that he should come directly to his love when the barrier that had kept him away was removed. So he knocked once more, this time louder, and waited. Then he heard Bill's voice above, and Tirzah's lower one. He knocked again. This time Bill stuck his tousled head from the upper window.

"Who's there?" he demanded gruffly.

"It's me, Alex!"

"Good gosh if it ain't! What's brought you here now?"

"I had to see Meggy."

"This time of night? Why, she's in bed asleep these three hours."

"No, I'm not, Father," a voice spoke suddenly, rapturously from the other window. "Oh, Alex, is it you?"

For a second Alex could not answer, and then he said, moving nearer: "Meggy, could you come down for a minute? There's something I want to speak to you about."

Bill leaned out a little farther, breaking into the unconventional conversation.

"Well, if this ain't the durndest funniest kettle of catfish I ever seen! Here's Alex walks off like a shot an' stays away two years, never once lookin' the course of us, an' then he turns up in the middle of the night with somethin' to say won't even keep till morning. If Andy hadn't been here today vouchin' for you I'd think you was out of your head."

"I'll be explainin' everything to Meggy, Mr. Parkinson, if you'll just let her come down."

"That's all right, Father," Meggy's clear voice called. "I'm on my way down, now."

"Well," Bill remarked with a hint of his usual amiability in his voice, "go ahead then. I guess the pair of you can be trusted."

Alex heard the quick footsteps on the back stairs, on the bare boards of the floor; then her hand was on the latch of the door; it was open; they were together.

"Meggy," he began impetuously, "you see that day I thought you meant— I didn't know till tonight when Mr. McKelvey was tellin' me—"

He stumbled, stopped. What were words with Meggy's beauty yearning toward him and his own arms aching to hold her? He caught her to him, and she yielded herself with a little quivering sigh. The dark years of their separation were wiped out as their lips met.

"I thought you didn't love me!"

"I was sure you didn't care!"

They whispered tremulously all the grief of their long sealed hearts, as they sat on the porch steps. They brooded upon their pain that their happiness now might be the greater. And then at last Alex spoke strongly, masterfully.

"I'm wantin' to marry you soon, Meggy. There's no good lettin' the time slip now when we love each other, an' when I'm gettin' on in the business. I can take care of you. Will you marry me this summer?"

Meggy raised her head from his arms, and as she did so, her hair, which had been hastily knotted at the neck, fell loose upon her shoulders, a golden flood in the white moonlight. She clutched it, ashamed, as though cloaked in it she was in some curious way naked before her lover. But Alex caught her fluttering hands in his own.

"Don't put it up yet. Let it stay a minute. I've wanted so long to see it like this—to feel the touch of it—"

"But it doesn't seem right to be sitting here, so late, with my hair hanging down—"

Alex laughed tenderly. "What differ could that make atween us?" he asked.

Then with hands gentle to the point of trembling he touched her hair, fondled it, smoothed it, and at last, having rescued the fallen wire pins, helped her knot it again to ease the shyness of her heart.

"You havena answered me yet, Meggy," he whispered. "Will you marry me soon? I canna wait, dearie."

Meggy felt the tide at the flood, sweeping her on. She looked up into his face, her eyes sad and lovely with the wonder of it.

"Yes, Alex, I'll marry you whenever you say."

"I'll be back on the Saturday next week an' speak with your father an' mother. We'll be makin' our plans then. Now I must be gettin' away, or they'll think I'm keepin' you too long."

There was the last good-bye, and then Meggy caught his face between her hands as he stood on the step below her.

"Alex," she whispered, "if you'd waited till tomorrow I'd never known the difference; but now I'll always love you more because you came tonight."

"There was no holdin' me," he said simply.

In another minute he was gone, and Meggy climbed the stairs

as if in a dream to the narrow back hall where her mother and old Mrs. MacIntosh waited, frightened, wistful, yet filled with deep feminine content, to hear the news.

When Alex returned that night McKelvey put up no pretense at being asleep. As a matter of fact he was sitting bolt upright in bed, with the light on, waiting. He heard Alex running up the stairs and guessed that all was well. But he was unprepared for the high spirits of his protégé. In all his months of intimate living with Alex he had known him as a man, overmature for his years, amazingly self-contained, determined, implacably set upon his course, heedless of all the lighter phases of life. Now he felt himself suddenly set upon by a youth who knocked over the desk chair in his onward rush, and hurled himself into the bedroom like an avalanche. He caught McKelvey by the shoulders and shook him with joyous disregard for the thin bones beneath the nightshirt.

"She'll have me! Do ye hear me? She'll have me!"

He didn't wait for a reply, but hurled his cap to the top of the gas chandelier, and then in a transport of utter abandon began to execute the Highland fling, while in the rich baritone which McKelvey had never heard before he sang at the top of his lungs:

"Oh, me mither ment me auld breeks,

An' oh, but they were duddy, oh!

She sent me tae get shod the mare

At Rabin Tamson's smiddy, oh!

Ful de doo a di do,

Ful de doo a daddy, oh!

Ful de doo a di do,

Auld Rabin Tamson's smiddy, oh!"

When he stopped for breath at last, he sat down suddenly on the foot of McKelvey's bed and looked at him with an odd expression of mingled rapture and apology.

"I doubt I've deaved you wi' my carryin' on. But I canna

help it, I'm that lifted!" In his excitement he slipped back unconsciously into his native dialect. "We're gettin' married, Meggy an' me, this summer."

And then McKelvey reached out his hand, and Alex grasped it.

The older man's voice was husky, but his delight was plain.

"Meggy's the loveliest, the finest— Oh, pshaw, you're a lucky fellow, Alex."

"Aye, an' it's myself that knows it, sir."

That night it was Alex who lay awake. Not even for the few remaining hours did he close his eyes. His grief, he had always been able to lock finally in sleep; this overpowering joy was different. He wanted all his consciousness to reassure him that it was true. He wanted to lie quiet but acutely alert, feeling again Meggy's supple body in his arms, seeing her unbound hair, hearing her whisper, "Yes, Alex, I'll marry you whenever you say."

The dawn broke over the hills in an irresistible cloud of glory, and as Alex watched it he felt himself as invincible as the new day.

Whether events were already shaped for an advantageous turn in his direction, or whether the power of his happiness was a new driving force that bent circumstances more than ever to his will, does not matter. The fact remains that the following week the mine had the biggest output it had had yet, and the Central Railroad and the Weston Steel Company both increased their orders.

On the following Saturday morning Alex dressed in his best suit and told McKelvey briefly that he believed he'd be going into Pittsburgh on a little errand.

"What are you up to now, Alex? You might as well confess it," McKelvey said anxiously. "There's no report due the Colonel today."

"I'm still thinkin' about the coke. I know you're against it at the present; but we're losin' time, I'm thinkin'. My plan would be to start buildin' the ovens right off."

"Good heavens, man! Why can't you let well enough alone for a little while, anyway? We're just beginning to see daylight, and you're wanting to plunge into more trouble. Besides, where will you get your backing? You know I've gone as far as I can, and we're carrying one bank loan already."

"To be sure I know that. But if I'm to run this business an' make money for us both I've got to use my own judgment. This is the way it's pullin' me now, an' I've got to follow it."

And as usual McKelvey ended his arguments by smiling at the young man both proudly and sadly.

"All right, Alex. So be it! I guess you know what you're doing. If I had had your get-up when I was young I might be President of the United States by this time—or in jail. I don't know which. Go ahead, my lad, and good luck go with you. Only don't tell me what you're going to do until tonight. I have to concentrate on saving a man's neck today."

Alex left the office and walked briskly to the railroad station, his chin set and his blue eyes bright.

From the first moment he had smelled the thick sulphurous smoke of the coke works and watched the amazing process—then only twenty years old in America—by which the crushed coal, shiny, black, and newly washed, was shoveled into beehive-shaped ovens and drawn out later in the form of porous columnar pieces of coke, now a lustrous gray, Alex had determined that all this held significance for him and his company.

There was, he knew, a steadily increasing market for these same porous gray lumps. The great steel mills at Pittsburgh, Homestead and Beaver Falls were dependent upon them. It was by means of coke then, that the two great industries of coal and steel were to be irrevocably bound up together; and in his own case Alex felt that something must speedily be done about it.

He boarded the train now, for Pittsburgh, staring thoughtfully at the countryside as he was borne along. The smoke of the mills hung thick, and the sun itself looked clouded. There was little of loveliness in the landscape, but Alex did not miss it as

he would once have done. Rarely now, and only for an instant, did he feel that inner rapture of the heart, that sudden spell which beauty in hill or dale, sky or tree, used to cast upon him. He was considering deeply as he passed through town after town with their hard, drab, commercial outlines, how much it would cost to build the new coke ovens of the Scotia Coal Company.

He walked the length of Union Station, impressed as always by its height and extent, and then made his way briskly down Liberty Avenue until he arrived at the Selden Bank. He carried his head high and felt no embarrassment as he entered the important precincts. They recognized him by this time, cashiers, tellers and errand boys, and to those who saw him now he nodded soberly, curtly, as befitted a man of business. He was not kept waiting long before he was ushered into the Colonel's private office. The old gentleman greeted him warmly.

"Well, Alex, how's business?"

"It's fine, sir. I've brought some more figures to show you."

He drew forth a sheet of paper and pushed it across to the Colonel, who was always pleasantly surprised by the directness with which this one caller went to the point.

"You can see for yourself that we're gettin' on. This week we've had the biggest output yet. I've got things runnin' in good shape, an' now I'd like to borrow more money."

The Colonel leaned back in his chair, eyeing the young man with amused satisfaction. He was a new type, and the old banker found it to his relish. Day after day he was accustomed to parrying questions with men who fawned upon him, men who pleaded with him, or who tried the braggart's art. Young MacTay, as he confided to his friends, came in like a breath of clean old-country air, presented his affairs with irrefutable Scotch logic and in the fewest possible words, expecting results as a natural course.

"What do you want the money for—expansion?"

"Aye. We ought to be startin' on coke ovens, an' that means

buildin' a reservoir an' a washer too. But that's where we'll be makin' our big money as time goes on. Coke."

"You think so?" the old man asked, testing him.

"I'm sure of it. For every ton of steel made today there has to be one and a half tons of coal mined and made into coke. Don't that prove it?"

The Colonel stroked his burnsidies and was thoughtful.

"How many ovens would you start with?"

"I was thinkin' of fifty. Less than that hardly pays, and we can always be addin' to them."

"They have a little string of five hundred out at Larimer's Station," the Colonel said slyly, "and of course Frick has—"

"Aye. I know it. Gie me time, sir."

And then the Colonel laughed.

"How much do you want, Alex?"

"I'd thought of ten thousand. Could you let me have it on my own note? I don't want to put more on Mr. McKelvey."

The Colonel said nothing for several minutes. He scanned the paper again with its firm figures, he looked keenly at Alex who gave him back his look squarely. At last he spoke.

"The trouble with me is, I'm a gambler at heart, and while I usually suppress it, I have to speculate once in a while just to keep my blood up. Only I don't tamper with the stock market. I speculate in men! I'm going to give you this loan, Alex."

He lighted a stogie. "You see, I've kept my own tab on you. I sent a scout out there just a month ago to look around your property. He brought back a good report." He picked up a paper that his secretary had placed before him as Alex came in, and scanned it silently:

Lands good, mine well built, manager (MacTay) on job all day, keeps books evenings, knows his business down to the ground. Advise backing him further if he asks for it.

"When we get the note fixed up, the money will be transferred to your personal account. I'm lending this to you purely

upon my faith in you. In other words, you yourself are the collateral. I trust you not to fail me."

"I won't. You can sit easy, sir, an' I thank you verra much for your kindness."

When the transaction was ended, Alex walked out again into the June sunshine. The coke ovens were now assured, and he could give his mind over to another errand. He walked slowly along the street looking at the shop windows. At a jewelry store which impressed him with its chaste elegance he stopped. He had felt no hesitation in demanding a ten-thousand-dollar loan at the bank, but his business in the jewelry shop filled him with odd tremors. He cleared his throat, which felt tight, and walked in. A suave salesman in an extremely tight-fitting coat approached him with faint condescension.

"Yes, sir?" he said with rising inflection.

"I'll be lookin' at rings," Alex said thickly.

"Yes. What kind?"

"Weddin' rings."

"Oh, yes! This way, please."

He set forth a tray for his customer's inspection. Alex finally selected a slender circlet and turned it over, examining it.

"Do you know the size?"

"Well, it's for a very small hand."

"That might fit. Is she wearing an engagement ring with it?"

"What's that, now?"

The clerk smiled loftily.

"That's the ring a man gives a girl when she promises to marry him: a set ring."

"Ah," said Alex, flushing. "I might be lookin' at some."

The clerk drew out another tray and placed it upon the counter. He indicated an assortment of semiprecious stones.

"These are the more inexpensive ones," he said.

"What kind will they be usin' most?" Alex inquired.

"Oh, the diamond is the thing, of course, for those who can

afford it, but these others do very nicely. Here, now, is an opal—”

“I’ll be lookin’ at the diamonds,” Alex said shortly, thinking to himself, “It’s a one of them Dennim would be givin’ her, an’ I canna do less.”

The clerk eyed him with superiority. “Diamonds come high, young man, and we don’t sell on credit in this house.”

“Who’s askin’ you for credit?” Alex returned sharply. “Let me hae a look at the things, an’ get on with it.”

The clerk was decidedly nettled. This raw old-country youth had a domineering way, and ought to be set in his place. He had probably blundered into Bassatt’s when he ought to be doing his buying at a department store counter. He placed before him now a tray of large and glittering stones, and said nothing.

Alex studied them. “What’ll you be askin’ for that one?” he said, pointing one out.

“Five hundred dollars.”

“And this one?”

“Three hundred.”

Alex glanced up. The clerk wore a small unpleasant smile. Alex looked at him keenly for a moment, then wheeled abruptly and walked to the back of the store, where an elderly man sat at a small desk.

“Would you mind tellin’ me, sir, whether you’ve got diamond rings cheaper than three hundred dollars?”

“Certainly,” said the older man, who happened to be Mr. Bassatt himself. “We have them as low as fifty, with small diamond chips for twenty-five.”

“Aye, I suspectit it. Would you mind waitin’ on me? I canna get on wi’ yon chap.”

Mr. Bassatt rose at once. “What’s the difficulty?” he asked as he led the way back to the ring counter.

“We don’t get on, sir, an’ I’m in a hurry.”

“I naturally assumed—” the embarrassed clerk put in.

"It never pays to assume, Rogers," said the older man. "Now," addressing Alex, "here is something you might like."

With infinite deference on the one hand and careful comparison on the other, the sale was finally completed. Alex bought the wedding ring for six dollars and a solitaire diamond that dazzled him for seventy-five.

"If you'll be wrappin' them up I'll come back later wi' the money," Alex said with some slight show of confusion, as he started for the door.

Behind him the clerk looked, with the air of a man justified, at his employer.

"He'll never come back. You might have saved yourself the trouble. I had him sized up. Green, you know, but wanting to act big. Shall I put the rings back in the case?"

Mr. Bassatt hesitated. "It does look as if you're right, Rogers; but there's something about that young fellow— I'll wrap up the boxes on the chance."

In a few minutes Alex returned from the bank, counted the bills carefully upon the counter, picked up the precious package and put it into his vest pocket.

"Thank you very much, Mr.—"

"MacTay. An' I'm obliged to you, sir, for helpin' me."

"May I ask where you are employed?"

"At the Scotia Coal Company nigh-hand to Greensburg."

"Oh, yes!" Mr. Bassatt said thoughtfully. "I've heard of that. Have you worked there long?"

"Ever since I started it," Alex answered simply. And with another courteous bow to Mr. Bassatt and a stony glance at the clerk he was gone, leaving the two gentlemen to their own interesting reflections.

On the way into Pittsburgh Alex had had no thought except for the coke ovens and the loan, but now, with that strange trick of concentration of which he was capable, he put the business behind him. For the duration of the ride he was wholly the lover. The wedding ring lay next his heart; and as to the dia-

mond he was, on the one hand, disturbed over the extravagance which seemed beyond condoning and, on the other, convinced that, since for two long years he had never spent a penny except for bare necessities, he now had a perfect right to buy Meggy a ring "like the lave."

"Aye but her eyes'll pop oot when she sees it," he thought with delight.

When he reached Greensburg again it was past noon. He got a bite to eat, then left a note at the office for McKelvey, who was still at the courthouse.

. . . Mr. McKelvey, I got a good loan from Col. Selden (\$10,000) on my own note. I'm going to have a look at the mine and then I may ride out to the Parkinsons'. Be back on the Sunday.

A. MacT.

All was running well at the mine when he got there. Gilly was inside, but Pat was at hand; and Alex told him the news that in two weeks they would start building coke ovens. Pat was amazed.

"May the Devil admire me if you ain't always a jump ahead of where a body thinks you're at! So it's the coke business you're gettin' into next. Tell me, Alex, when you've made your million, what'll you do with it all?"

"I'll be buyin' me a steel mill belike," Alex answered, his gaze distant over the far hills. Until that very moment he had not consciously known that this ambition was within him.

"For the love of God!" Pat exclaimed in pseudo wonder. "An' what I'm aimin' at is a little extra ground for pasturin' a cow. It's one of us is quare now, for sartin."

Alex laughed and made sure no one else was near.

"I'm gettin' married on Meggy afore long," he said quietly.

Pat threw down his tools and sprang to grasp his friend's shoulders.

"Begor, an' you stand here talkin' about coke ovens with that

news to be told! When did you make up to her again? Och, Alex, but it's glad I am for you! I always thought if you'd only get your wind up an' go right after her she couldn't resist ye! When's the weddin'?"

"I'm not sure. Soon though. I'm goin' on out there now. I'll be back on the Sunday. How many cars have you filled today?"

Pat put both hands to his head and gave a long groan.

"Hear the unnatural crature! If he ain't talkin' of his weddin' an' coal cars in the same breath! Why can't ye be forgettin' your business for once an' go at makin' love like a man? Now it's meself could give you some pointers—"

Alex laughed and gave him a friendly shove.

"That's one thing I'm needin' nobody's help on," he said. "Check up on the cars, will you, Pat?" And with that he jumped to the pony's back and started off down the road.

It was supertime when he reached the farm, and so he put the pony into the shed and walked slowly toward the house. In the daylight now he could see that the barnyard was in the same litter in which he had found it three years ago. There was no hint of a new barn; flimsy, hastily constructed sheds stood on the ruins of the fire. The corners of the fields were unkempt, and the fences once more in need of repair.

"Things are runnin' slack again," he mused to himself. "I'll be havin' a look round the place tomorrow."

Meggy heard his step on the walk and ran to the porch to meet him. Their eyes had their own embrace, but that was all, for the family sat at the table watching. They welcomed him in warmly, for Meggy had told them all the story. Tirzah hurried to get another plate, and Alex sat down in his old place. But it was a new Alex, not only in his best suit but clothed also with the unconscious assurance that now clung to him. Bill was openly proud and jubilant over the turn affairs had taken; Mrs. MacIntosh eyed her young countryman keenly but without criticism, and Tirzah, who had always been fond of him, looked

gently upon him, her mother heart mysteriously satisfied even as it recognized a coming pain.

He told them all about the Scotia mine from the very beginning. He had his reasons for leading slowly up to the number of carloads they were selling now per week, and the latest plan for expansion involving the loan of that morning.

"My gosh, Alex! If you hain't got ahead since you was here! Andy McKelvey says if you keep on you'll be a millionaire some day."

"I intend to," Alex said quietly, looking at Meggy.

"Did you hear that?" Bill inquired excitedly of the family. "A millionaire! Dad burn me if I ever thought I'd live to see the day anybody'd say that at my table!"

Mrs. MacIntosh sniffed, though it was evident she was deeply impressed.

"Well," she remarked, "it's best not to stretch your arm farther than your sleeve'll let you, as the sayin' goes."

"It'll let him, all right," Bill went on, his enthusiasm mounting each minute. Already he pictured himself as living comfortably and without exertion upon his son-in-law's bounty. "Yes, sir, I'd bet my last dollar on Alex."

"It's the only one you'll ever have," the old lady put in acidly.

"Now, now," came Tirzah's voice, "let's stop any argument. We're glad to have Alex back and to know the Lord's prospering him. Get the pie, Meggy."

Alex was plainly nervous as the supper things were cleared away. He managed to have a quiet word with Meggy on the porch.

"Could you haud away somewhere for a few minutes? I've got to talk to the folks."

"Of course," said Meggy. "I'll be down at the spring."

When Alex reentered the kitchen the others were still there, for the evening was pleasantly cool. Mrs. MacIntosh sat by the window, and Bill on a tilted chair by the wall, while Tirzah

busied herself with some last work about the stove. The scene brought a fullness to Alex's throat as he recalled the year's round of evenings spent in the old kitchen. Next to Lamson Green this room seemed home to him. He stood now behind a chair and cleared his throat.

"There's something I've got to be tellin' you," he began, and at once there was utter silence in the room.

He hesitated then, for being a Scotchman wild horses could not have dragged the word "love" to his lips except when he spoke directly to the woman of his heart. So his phrasing had to be chosen with care.

"Meggy an' I—like each other, an' I'm wantin' to marry her. I hope you'll be agreed to it."

"Sure," Bill spoke up at once. "Sure, we're agreed. Why wouldn't we be?"

Mrs. MacIntosh silenced him with a look over her glasses. She had a deep sense of occasion. The present one manifestly called for an element of time and discussion. The sacred unit of the family had been appealed to upon a momentous question. There must be the dignity of conclave before a decision was rendered.

She turned toward Alex and took charge.

"You say you're wantin' to marry our Meggy. How long have you been feelin' this way?"

"Since the first minute I clapped eyes on her."

"Tut! It takes time for the heart to settle."

"Well," said Alex, "I havena changed in three years."

Mrs. MacIntosh gloried in the ring of his voice, but she only sniffed with her long nose and looked judicially solemn.

"When would you be wantin' to get married?"

"Soon," Alex answered steadily. "Very soon, for I'd like to be gettin' it over before I start on the ovens. The weddin' trip, I mean."

"What do you call soon?" the old lady inquired.

"In a week, mebbe."

Tirzah cried out. "Oh, Alex, she couldn't! You mustn't ask it of her. A girl wants months to get her things ready an' make her plans—"

"Na, na. We'll have no weddin' haste here to set folks' tongues waggin'," Mrs. MacIntosh put in. "You can just bide your time. . . . Where would you be takin' her to live? You've no house ready. Na, na. Let's have no more talk—"

"I'll explain it to ye," Alex said slowly. "Now since I got the loan I must get on wi' the ovens. While they're buildin' an' gettin' started I've got to be there every day. It'll be a year be-like afore I could leave. An' I'm wantin' to take Meggy on a little trip to the sea mebbe—"

"The sea!" cried the old lady. "Why, man, it's a day's journey off."

"Aye. An' this is my plan. If we could be gettin' married next week, we'd take our trip; an' then I'd bring her back home here for a few months, an' I'd be out on the Saturday nights. She could be gettin' her things ready then, an' I could be lookin' up a house in Greensburg."

They all sat for a moment silent. The two women looked across at each other, their eyes yielding. They would still have Meggy with them longer, and she would get her trip. As it had always been, Alex's logical forethought pressed them into compliance.

"Sounds all right to me," Bill ventured carefully, feeling now that the matter had somehow gone beyond him entirely.

"Of course," Tirzah said slowly, "if you just take your trip now when you can get away and then let Meggy come home again and take her time to get her things ready—"

"Aye. It puts a different face on it, I'll admit," the old lady agreed. "Does Meggy know about this?"

"No," Alex said. "But she told me she'd marry me whenever I say."

"Oh, she did, did she?" Mrs. MacIntosh cried spiritedly. "I thought the girl had more gumption. For myself I hate to see a

man too sure of himself at his courtin'. An' you'd just better—"

Alex smiled at her, and she felt her heart stir at the look in his eyes.

"I was on the anxious seat long enough," he said. "You oughtn't to begrudge me bein' sure of her now."

"Well, well," the old lady capitulated, "get along after her then, an' see what she thinks about it."

Alex swept them all with his glance. It would have been impossible for him to put into words the deep intention of his heart to make Meggy happy and give her the spoils of the world for her pleasure. Even if he could have voiced it, the revelation would have sounded out of place in that simple presence between the kitchen walls.

"I'm obliged to ye," he said briefly, and then hurried down the path to the spring.

Meggy was waiting on the bench there under the willow tree, and all Alex's strength seemed to melt within him at the sight of her. He sat down beside her without a word and took her in his arms. When he could speak at last, he drew out from his breast pocket the little box containing the diamond.

"I've brought something for you."

"Oh, Alex, a ring?"

"Aye. Open it up."

Meggy touched the spring; the lid flew open, and the sparkling stone lay revealed. She stared at it incredulously; then her eyes misted over.

"I can't touch it! It's too beautiful!"

Alex put it on her finger. It fitted perfectly, shining and twinkling in the late evening light. They sat watching it, overcome by their pride and joy.

"Meggy, I've got a favor to ask you."

"What is it?"

"I want to get married a week from today." He disregarded her start and cry of amazement, and went steadily on, laying his plan before her. He had worked out every detail. If they

were wed early on the Saturday morning they could catch the ten-thirty train east from Greensburg. He would rather not have a lot of fuss at the wedding. McKelvey, of course, would come, and maybe some of their old neighbors if she wished. He and Meggy could have a week or maybe ten days at the ocean. Meggy here drew a long breath.

"I never thought I'd see the ocean, Alex, ever!"

"I want you to see it, an' I'm hungry for the smell of it myself. Will you do it, Meggy?"

"Oh, Alex, I couldn't! Not next week. Why—why, we're only just engaged, aren't we?"

"You promised you'd marry me any time I said. You see I must get on wi' my ovens, an' this is the only way I can figure we can be takin' the trip for a year to come belike."

Meggy sat silent for so long that Alex was frightened.

"I got a new silk dress this spring," she said at last slowly. "Mother and I could maybe drive into Greensburg early next week and get shoes and a hat and—and things. But—oh, Alex, it's so soon!"

"Too soon?" he asked, looking down at her, his own eyes full ablaze.

"I—I suppose not," she faltered. Then very slowly added, "I—guess—I—could."

That night as Alex lay in his old room, from which his "kist" had never been removed, he thought of something which through all these more than thirty months had been forgotten. It was the Scotch thistle, wrought in gold, that his mother had given him the night before he left home. He jumped out of bed now, relighted his lamp and rummaged in the chest. He found the pin in a small box where he had put it then along with some cards and farewell messages from the young folks at Lamson. He unwrapped it from the paper and held it in his hand, shaken with a poignancy of remembrance. The thistle was a symbol not alone of his mother's devotion but of Scotland itself—the land that had borne and suckled and reared him. Blood,

bone, sinew, and spirit were of that north country beyond the sea. True, he was an American now; he would live here always; the new country had already given him his love and would later give him his fortune. For long periods of time he would go on forgetting that he had known any other citizenry. Then in some sudden moment such as this, the habits and associations of years would slip from him like a garment, and Scotland would rise up to claim him as her own. He saw this clearly, and his young head bowed before this strange power of nativity, the only power he felt himself incapable of overcoming.

He put the thistle back into the box, saying to himself: "I'll gie it to her on our weddin' mornin'. I'll pin it on her dress wi' my own hands."

Then when he was again in bed he kept thinking until he fell asleep: "I must be writin' all my news to the folks at home. I've got a bit lax aboot that. I must be writin' to my mother."

Before he left the next afternoon Mrs. MacIntosh hobbled toward the sitting room, motioning him to follow. Once there she sat down and rested her thin clawlike hands upon the top of her stick. She was deeply moved, Alex could see. A vast respect for the old woman rose within him. In spite of her sharp tongue, he knew that she loved Meggy with a great love, and that her heart held the distilled wisdom of a long life.

"Alex," she said, "I've got a few things to say to you, an' I hope you'll take them in the spirit they're given."

"Aye," said Alex. "I will."

"There's an old sayin' that young folks would do well to mind, an' that is, 'There's more to marriage than four bare legs in a bed.'"

"Aye," Alex answered again, smiling faintly.

"What I'm gettin' at is, there has to be plenty of give an' take in marriage; an' I don't want Meggy to do all the givin'."

She cleared her throat hard.

"You're a strong man, Alex, an' awful set in your own way. You'll be goin' far, I doubt. But what I want you to promise

me is that you'll never get so bound up in your coal business you'll just give Meggy the leavin's."

She silenced him when he started to speak.

"Oh, I know how you're feelin' now, an' how you'll be feelin' a month from now. But it's ten years ahead I'm afeard of. Mind, Alex, a woman's not a thing to be shoved aside when you're busy an' played with when you've got a bit leisure. I'm speakin' plain to you for Meggy's sake. You've got to feel you're one flesh the two of you all the time, an' not just when you're wantin' her. An' mind you won't forget to be kind to her in little ways, for that means more to a wife in the long run than rings an' jools. I want your promise."

"I promise," Alex said, his face grave, his voice low.

The old lady's grimness relaxed. A whimsical smile crossed her face.

"All right. See you keep it. If you don't, I'll come back from the grave an' hant you!"

She waved him toward the kitchen but recalled him when he had almost reached the door.

"I don't mean that I ain't set up over that ring of Meggy's. I'd like cruel well to know what you paid for it. I'll not tell the rest, mind, if you want it kept secret."

Alex came back to her chair and named the price, his pride showing in his voice.

Mrs. MacIntosh threw up both hands while her stick rattled to the floor.

"Losh keep us!" she cried. For a long moment she said nothing more; then she added: "Our Meggy'll never come to want with you—I'm sure of that, Alex. And that's one comfort to them as has known what it is to be ay pinchin'."

So on this brighter note his interview with the old lady ended, and he went to make his last farewell to Meggy before their wedding day.

When McKelvey heard the news that night he was at first dumfounded but in a few minutes not only satisfied but en-

thusiastic over the plan. He urged Atlantic City as the place for the honeymoon and even knew a modest hotel not far from the boardwalk where he himself had once stayed. He was full of suggestions. They must take a chair car. They must eat in the diner. Alex must have new clothes.

"But my suit's fine. I'm no needin' another."

McKelvey drew a slip of paper toward him.

"No, but you must go like a gentleman in other respects," he said. "Here is what I suggest." He passed the paper across to Alex who read:

3 new white shirts
5 " collars
1 " necktie
2 suits summer underwear
2 white nightshirts

Alex stared at the list, his cheeks flushing a little as he got to the end. He had taken note, of course, of McKelvey's personal habits in the months they had spent together, but vaguely supposed that some articles of his wardrobe were merely the appurtenances of age. This put a different face on the matter.

"You mean even a young chap would be wearin'—"

"Certainly."

"I'll be gettin' them then."

The week flew on wings. Through the day Alex concentrated upon the matter of building the reservoir, which was the first step toward the making of coke. He and Gilly tramped the small stream on the Barnwall farm, deciding upon the exact spot for the dam. This was to be started at once.

At night, after his books were put into order, Alex made careful notes of McKelvey's suggestions on the subject of traveling like a gentleman. A room had been engaged in the Bristol Hotel. A carriage and the two best horses in the stable had been bespoken from Coshey's (McKelvey had insisted upon paying for this part of the trip) for six o'clock Saturday morning. An old

bag of McKelvey's, somewhat rusty but withal genteel, stood packed in the bedroom. Between the two men there had developed an ostentatious casualness to cover up the tension of their feelings.

McKelvey would be Alex's only wedding guest, since Pat had confided with an inordinate show of pride, which Alex considered immodest and uncalled for, that Kathleen was not going out in company just then!

On Saturday, Alex woke before dawn, and from certain movements in the big bed he knew that McKelvey had also forsworn sleep for the day. They were dressed and ready long before the appointed hour. Alex had never looked handsomer, McKelvey thought. And so indeed it should be. There was that growing distinction in his bearing which comes from accomplishment. He moved and spoke even now as a man of authority. In repose his face looked older than his twenty-four years. Long continued physical strain, coupled with the inner stress of the spirit, had taken from it the subtle cast of youth and given instead those indefinable tracings of early maturity. When he laughed, however, all his old boyishness returned.

McKelvey watched him, glorying almost with a father's pride in the hard, clean strength and beauty of his body. Yes, here was a mate worthy of Meggy, and he, childless old hermit that he was, had brought it about.

"I've a suspicion," he thought, smiling to himself, "that today I'm winning my most important case."

The early morning was fair as they drove through the countryside, but Alex was plainly nervous and disinclined to talk. Once he broke out suddenly, "It'll be the third year after all."

"What's that?"

"Nothin'," said Alex, as though surprised he had spoken. "I was just thinkin' I'm gettin' married the third year after I landed in America."

"That's right."

When they had almost reached the house Alex spoke again.

"I'm hopin' the preacher gets here all right. Of course it's early yet."

But Tirzah and Mrs. MacIntosh had foreseen every contingency. Bill had been dispatched to New Salem for the minister and his wife in the light surrey when the kitchen clock still lacked a quarter of five.

"For gosh sakes," he had remonstrated, "it ain't goin' to take three hours to get there an' back! The weddin' ain't till eight."

But the women had their way. So now, when Alex and McKelvey drove up to the shed, the black mare with the surrey was already tethered there, as were several other horses with their buggies.

McKelvey suggested they enter by the front door to mark the occasion, but Alex demurred and took his accustomed way along the side walk. Even at that distance from the kitchen savory odors greeted them, for Tirzah had determined that, if breakfast it had to be at Meggy's wedding, then it should be one to be remembered. She was frying chicken when they entered, with a great checked apron over her silk dress. Several neighbor women bustled about importantly, carrying plates and covered dishes to the sitting room, where the long table was laid. Mrs. MacIntosh in her state black silk and a black lace cap was just starting for the parlor to greet the other newly arrived guests. There was no sign of Meggy.

"Well, Andy! Well, Alex!" Tirzah said calmly. "This is all very sudden, but we hope it's for the best. Meggy's upstairs getting dressed, and the breakfast's just about ready. The preacher's here, so we can have the ceremony just as soon as Meggy's down, and that'll give more time for you all to enjoy your food. My, Alex, you look fine this morning!"

"An' I'm feelin' fine, I can tell you, Mrs. Parkinson. Are there many folks here?"

"Just a few neighbors and some of Meggy's girl friends. I thought you'd better wait here, for Meggy's comin' down the back way, an' then you can both just walk in—"

"Mrs. Parkinson!" It was the voice of one of the Houston girls from the next farm who had just appeared at the stair door. She looked perturbed. "I think that Meggy wants to see you."

Tirzah handed her cooking fork to one of the women. "Just turn these over again, will you, please? I'll see what Meggy wants."

McKelvey went on into the parlor, and Alex stood on the back porch waiting. His heart was pounding in his chest. He was embarrassed by the strange women in the kitchen. He knew by their lowered tones that they were speaking of him.

"Everything's ready now if Meggy would just come," one of them was saying, when he heard a step behind him on the porch. It was Tirzah, her face troubled.

"I think," she said in a low voice, "that you'd better speak to Meggy yourself. You can mebbe do more than I could."

"What's wrong?" Alex asked, stricken.

"Oh, I doubt she's just a little overwrought, but I think you'd better see her. She's all dressed, so you can go up to her room. You know which is hers."

Alex climbed the stairs, his forehead cold with fear. The golden wonder of his wedding day had been too great to be true perhaps. Something now had overcast the brightness of the morning. Something was wrong with Meggy.

He paused outside her door, the door he had glimpsed so often with yearning during his stay on the farm. He did not knock; instead he pushed it slowly open and stepped inside. Meggy sat on the edge of her bed, her face buried in her hands.

Alex stood for a moment terrified at the sight; then he went quickly to her and raised her in his arms.

"What is it, Meggy? Tell me what's botherin' you?"

He could feel her slight shoulders quivering as he held her to him.

"I canna stand this, Meggy. Tell me, dearie, what's makin' you greet?"

Meggy raised her head and began to pour out the burden of her heart. "Oh, Alex, it's too soon to get married now! I knew it all the time. I've worked so hard this week. We had all the house to go over, and my clothes to fix, and the extra baking to do; and now I'm all tired out, and I wanted to look my best! And then nobody's even seen my ring yet! I'll be married before people even know I'm engaged, and it won't be the same afterwards!" She paused while the tears came afresh.

"And it seems queer to have a wedding early in the morning like this, before breakfast; and I always wanted to have a real pretty wedding and be married in a white dress with a party afterwards, and then I'd change to a dark one to go away in! And now everything's all wrong, and I don't like my dress very well; but it's all we could get in such a hurry! And besides," she ended, in a new burst of sobs, "I've been so rushed I just feel all at once as if I hardly know you!"

"What's that?" Alex asked quickly. Then very gently he added, "Does this look as if you hardly know me?" For Meggy was clinging hard to him, her face pressed against his coat.

At the words she looked up slowly, met his eyes with the deep light in them, and then smiled in spite of herself through her tears. As she did so Tirzah entered with a cup of steaming coffee, her anxious face showing relief as she saw her daughter's changed countenance. Alex took the cup from her.

"That's it, Mrs. Parkinson. That's what she's needin'. Tell them downstairs we'll be ready in ten minutes."

Then as Tirzah closed the door after her, Alex drew Meggy with him toward a chair, sat down himself and took her on his knee.

"Now," he said in the voice Meggy knew was for her alone, "sup up your coffee like a good girl, an' then we must be gettin' on with things."

Meggy flushed shyly.

"I never sat on your knee before, Alex."

"It's time you was learnin' then," he answered, smiling. "Now

look ye: I've got to get on wi' my ovens. Every month I delay on them I'm losin' money. This is the only way I could plan the weddin' so we could get our trip in. You know that, don't you?"

Meggy nodded her head very slowly as she finished her coffee. Alex took the cup from her and set it down. Then he drew her close.

"But that's not all of it." She felt his arms tighten. "I've loved you since that first day when I saw you ridin' up on Beauty. It's ay been like a fire in my bones, but when I thought it was Den-nim you wanted I went through hell. Now, when I know the right way of it, I don't want to wait. I want you for my wife. I love you wi' all my soul, Meggy. Is it all right now about the weddin'?"

Meggy slipped from his knee.

"Yes, of course it's all right. I—I don't know why I broke down like that. It was just—all at once— But now I must freshen up. My eyes are all red—and I must fix my hair. Go on down, Alex, and I'll be there in a minute."

But Alex shook his head decidedly.

"Na, na! I'm not leavin' this room till you come wi' me. I'll look out the window if you like, but I'm stayin' here till you're ready. An' as for your dress, you couldn't look bonnier wi' ten yards of white trailin' after you!"

So Meggy laughed again a bit shakily, then bathed her eyes at the washstand, rearranged her hair and dabbed the tiniest bit of white chalk on her chamois skin to apply to her nose, glancing often at her lover's back as he stood, very straight and firm, by the window.

Just as she turned to say she was ready, Alex made a sudden movement.

"Wait a bit," he said, "I'm forgettin' something."

He crossed the hall quickly to his old room and returned with the pin. His face wore a gravity that went to Meggy's heart.

"This is a present for you from my mother," he said. "She

give it to me as I was leavin' home an' said to keep it for my bride. She wore it at her own weddin'. I wish she could see it on you."

Meggy fingered it reverently.

"Oh, it's beautiful, Alex! A Scotch thistle. And from your mother. I'll write to her now and tell her how I love it."

"I'll fasten it on for you," Alex said. As he did so Meggy saw that his hands were trembling.

He kissed her then, and they went down the stairs, paused in the kitchen while a little flurry of announcement preceded them to the waiting guests, then crossed the hall and took their places before the minister at the parlor mantel.

The vows were spoken, the prayer was uttered, the wedding ring was put on. There was the stir of handshaking and good wishes and real gayety at the breakfast table. McKelvey saw to that, and Bill's hearty guffaws set the pace.

Meggy looked radiant now as though she had forgotten all about the strange tears of an hour ago. But Alex remembered. It was bad luck for a bride to weep on her wedding day.

He realized now that their marriage had begun with a sacrifice of Meggy's wishes to his own.

"I must be makin' that up to her," he kept thinking under cover of the laughter. "I must be sure to make it up."

McKelvey drove the carriage with the newlyweds in the back seat. Everyone stood about in the road as they started, with a rain of missiles pursuing them. Old Mrs. MacIntosh had hobbled to the gate, and her shrill voice rose above the others:

"Rice for good luck and auld shoon for bonnie bairns!"

The good-byes grew fainter, and the laughter. The road swallowed them up. The dew was still glistening upon the grass, and the morning air was sweet with the scent of the June clover. McKelvey sat like a graven image staring straight ahead of him, and so after a mile Alex concluded he might safely turn and look into the eyes of his bride.

As to McKelvey, when the train had pulled out for Greens-

burg and he had waved his silk hat for the last time at the two faces by the window, he found he could see nothing around him clearly. He drew his hand hastily across his eyes. "I haven't shed a tear for forty years," he thought as he walked back slowly to where the office, very bare, very silent now, awaited him.

But Alex and Meggy were borne swiftly eastward to the ocean that had at first separated them by three thousand miles and then in the strange dispensations of Providence served as the pathway by which he had come to her. The comfort and elegance of the Pullman, the thrilling experience of the diner, the Horseshoe Curve, the mountains, the valleys, the looks exchanged of near possession, the gleam of Meggy's new rings as her hand moved in the sun, the shine of the thistle at her breast—all these and more made up the day. Then came dusk, then darkness, the lights of Atlantic City, the hotel, their own room. But Alex must needs take her, even late as it was, to see and smell the ocean before they settled themselves for the night. He drank hungrily the fresh salt air and described to her the view from Berwick lighthouse when the herrin' fleet came in.

There had never been, since the world began, two people so happy! They said it, laughing, as they walked miles upon the boardwalk in the sunshine, fascinated by the novel sights and sounds; they whispered it gravely as they sat far out on the pier in the dark watching the lights at sea and hearing the ceaseless rush of the waves on the beach like hearts beating at the flood. But land and sea were not the greatest marvel. There was another that wrapped them in itself and colored the moments with its own light. This was the eternal miracle of sex—as mysterious, as beautiful, as fresh to them as though they were being blown upon by the first winds of Eden.

They went to sleep at night with Meggy's slender body fitted under Alex's arm, her hand holding tightly to his; they woke to look into each other's eyes dazed with the inexhaustible wonder of their new intimacy.

The last day came too soon, the final evening. They stood far

out above the ocean, with no one else near. Alex had been quieter, less carefree that day than before. He spoke now slowly, feeling for his words.

"Meggy, there's something I want to be talkin' to you about. It's my business. I'm undertakin' a big thing, an' I've got to put all of myself into it to get ahead. After we go back now an' I'm seein' you only at the week ends it'll be easy to put the work behind me then. But when we're livin' together all the time—" He paused.

"Yes?" Meggy prompted, a startled question in her voice.

"I'll be busy most of the evenings on my books an' plans. Will you be lonesome, think you?"

Meggy gave a little laugh. "My goodness, you scared me! You sounded so solemn. No, I won't be lonesome. You see I might be—I might have— Oh, Alex, don't you hope before too long we have a—baby?"

"What?" said Alex as though intensely startled at the idea.

"People do, you know, after they get married." Meggy's voice held shy laughter.

Alex did not reply at once.

"I havena given much thought to bairns, I doubt," he said.

"But wouldn't you like it?"

There was a barely perceptible pause.

"Oh, aye. Some day I'd like fine to have a son to come in the business wi' me."

For the first time in the ecstatic week Meggy felt a flicker of doubt cross her heart.

"And a little girl?" she persisted.

"I've got my little girl!" Then he added tensely, "There's just two things I've been really wantin' in life. I wanted you for my wife, an' now I've got you! An' I want to be a millionaire by the time I'm thirty-five."

Meggy's eyes swept the ocean. All at once it looked dark and vast and threatening. Who could stand before its power? How

frail the human hand that tried to stay that resistless tide! She shivered.

"I'm sort of afraid, Alex."

"Afraid?" he cried, bending above her. "What of?"

"I don't know. Your getting rich, maybe. It's so strange. I wish we could live always on the farm and you run the coal bank like you used to."

Alex laughed. "When you've got a grand house an' fine dresses an' your own carriage you won't be wishin' that."

"And nothing can ever come between us?" she asked tremulously.

He caught her to him. Never before had she felt the full force of his strength. As though unleashed by her question, his stark passion for her stood revealed.

"Nothing can ever come between us," he repeated fiercely. "Tell me you believe it!"

Meggy surrendered herself to the rushing tide. "Yes," she whispered breathlessly. "Yes—I believe it."

CHAPTER V

ON A certain night in December six months later, Alex and McKelvey stood on one of the encircling hills just beyond Greensburg and saw against the sky a new flame of red. There were other dull crimson drifts along the horizon. When Alex had first come to stay with McKelvey he had marveled at them. Sweeping up from the darkness of the valleys, a lambent heat tossed its glow into the black circle of the sky; great fires against the clouds of the night, ever blazing and never consumed. Alex's poet soul had striven within him at the beauty of it. But this feeling soon passed as he learned the secret of the drifts of flame. They were the coke ovens.

And this magnificent lighting of the evening skies above the western Pennsylvania hills was not done for scenic effect. The coal operators were not concerned with the beauty; neither were the Poles who in black greasy pants and with naked sweating breasts drew the coke from the separate infernos with long-handled iron scrapers. It was all a part of the great drama of the coal in which once quiet countrysides travailed and were rent to bring forth what was hidden in the earth so that industry might grow by Gargantuan leaps and many men grow rich in the process.

McKelvey spoke first.

"Well, there they are, Alex, in full blast. Your own coke ovens. Are you satisfied?"

Alex gave a short laugh.

"Satisfied? Man, I've just begun!"

But though it was only the beginning as far as Alex's ambi-

tion was concerned, there were many now who felt that the Scotia mine was well along the way to becoming a large enterprise. As though Fate had designed it for the purpose, the brook on the Barnwall farm had now become a wide reservoir from which the water was piped to the big new washer, rearing high its intricate machinery. From the washer ran the bucket-line incline up to the towering new thousand-ton bins that stored the crushed and washed coal until it was dropped into the small laries that ran along the crest of the coke ovens, carrying the fuel to feed their devouring flames.

From the start Alex had decided to make only the best coke. There must be no short cuts, no scrimping on labor or material. Gilly had remonstrated, but Alex was firm.

"I've thought this through. We're up against stiff competition. We've got to be known for something, an' it's goin' to be as makers of the finest furnace coke on the market. I'm shootin' high, but I'm goin' to hit just the same."

Ever since his wedding Alex had been a different man. Not only McKelvey was aware of it; Pat and Gilly and the other men at the mine chaffed him about his altered behavior. For now his laughter was ready, his blue eyes were bright; and his indefatigable pressing of the work in hand seemed not the relentless power of a machine as before, but rather a tireless capacity that sprang from happy hidden wells of strength.

While it had first been his plan to have a home for Meggy ready by September, they had both decided it was best to wait until the ovens were completed and operating since Alex was working often far into the night.

The intervening months, however, had been immeasurably happy ones for Meggy, and she was always to remember them with a tenderness that caught at her throat. For, according to the arrangement, she was both maid and wife during this interlude. Through the week she went about her usual duties at the farm, carrying always deep within her the new joy. The days were full, for there were quilts and comforts to be made

in the long afternoons during which the three women talked together as members now of one sisterhood; there were little trips to New Salem with the pleasant excitement of being addressed as the bride; there were many girlish "surprise parties" at neighboring houses in her honor. All that was habitual in the peaceful life of the farm surrounded her through the week. Then, on the Saturday, Alex came!

During the fine weather she always walked up the road to meet him and rode back behind him on the pony. After supper they strolled through the fields or the woods in the scented dusk of summer or the mellow haze of autumn. They walked and talked as lovers until the darkness finally drove them to the house.

In the presence of the family, however, Alex's behavior was no whit different from that it had always been. It was as impossible for him to kiss Meggy in front of them now that she was his wife, as it would have been for him to dishonor her before their marriage. Tirzah watched the young couple with deep solicitude.

"I wonder," she said one Monday morning to Mrs. MacIntosh after Alex had bidden Meggy an apparently casual good-bye and was gone, "if Alex is an affectionate person."

"He's a Scotchman," her mother replied. "You must mind that. You can't open his heart wi' his coat buttons."

But one day, when Tirzah and Bill had driven to town and Meggy and her grandmother had the big kitchen to themselves, the old lady looked up from her sewing.

"Well, Meggy," she said abruptly, "what sort of a man have you got, anyhow?"

Meggy raised her clear eyes, startled, then colored beautifully.

"Oh, Granny, he's wonderful! You'd never think it, but he's like a lover in a book! Sometimes I'm almost worried for fear it isn't"—the young voice hesitated and became low—"for fear it isn't quite nice to love him as much as I do!"

A softening mist seemed to overcast the old lady's sharp

features. Though no one would have guessed it now, she, too, had once known love's breathless heights.

"You needn't to worry, Meggy, my child," she said gently. "Just thank God on your bended knees you can love your husband like that. For it ain't every woman that does."

By the end of December Alex announced that he had found a house. They could have it the first of the year. When he took Meggy to see it, she was quite overcome, for it had to her an air of city pretentiousness. It was small and slender, but built solidly of brick, with a porch front and back; and it stood between two larger houses on the hill where Alex had walked that night of his despair. The location was perfect, and the rent moderate. Not even McKelvey knew that Alex had been hunting just such a house since last June, pushing aside all offers that fell short of the ideal in his mind, doggedly confident that he would find it at last. Meggy's joy was his full reward.

On a bright cold day in January a wagon driven by Bill lurched its way over the country roads, reaching Greensburg in midafternoon. In it was Meggy's "flittin'": two fine old bureaus and odd chairs from the farm, a bedstead, a table or two that Tirzah said she could easily spare; a roll of rag carpet, a chest of quilts and blankets, boxes of pans and dishes, and, most suggestive of all that Meggy was leaving the old life for the new, her trunk alongside Alex's kist.

As the days passed, Meggy herself found Alex a changed person. The deep reticences of his nature vanished now that he was alone with his bride. The little house seemed after the early breakfast to settle into a passive waiting. While Meggy swept and scrubbed, washed and polished, singing as she worked, there still was quietness. Then suddenly, between five and six, the front door burst open, and Alex raced through the hall to catch her up in his arms wherever she was. He laughed, he sang, he ran, shouting, up and down the stairs, he pounded nails for pictures, he adjusted the stovepipe, he mended the step at the cellar door! He was everywhere, exuberant in his strength,

jubilant in his joy. He was now as he had been in the old care-free days at Lamson Green, only infinitely happier.

McKelvey always came to them ceremoniously for Sunday dinner, at which Meggy, flushed with pride in her cooking, dimpled and smiled at them from her end of the table, causing both hearts to beat faster at the sweet miracle of her beauty. McKelvey, just then, was full of a piece of news. It seemed that E. B. Rockwell, after living for years in a big house near the mine, had purchased the old Houston mansion in Greensburg and moved there the very week Alex and Meggy had settled in their new home. The Rockwell house was now by way of being one of the show places of the town, and rumor had it that a huge housewarming reception was to be given as soon as the decorators had finished their work. Sally Rockwell, who was many years younger than her husband, belonged to one of the first families of the county seat, being the daughter of old Judge Marvel, and now, with her husband's coal fortune behind her, was prepared to become a social leader.

Meggy, listening, found it all talk of another world and went back in her mind to the problem of which window would yield the best sunlight for her geranium slips, and what kind of curtains she would buy for her parlor.

But Alex and McKelvey exchanged looks over the news of the Rockwell reception. All the people in town who were anybody would be invited. McKelvey himself would be there. Alex's strong hands grasped each other as though with all their strength something was eluding their hold. He pondered the matter day after day as he went about his work or watched Meggy in the evenings with the devouring light in his eyes. He knew now that along with his determination to make a fortune was another ambition. He wanted the doors of the great to swing open for him and Meggy. He wanted no barrier between them and the ultimate power of which he dreamed. He spoke no word of this to McKelvey, but they understood each other.

By the first of March all Greensburg talked of the coming

reception. Meggy, who had made friends at once with her neighbors, knew more of the supposed details than the men. Everyone, it seemed, who had any chance of being invited, was agog to see the splendors of the great house. One rumor had it that Sally Rockwell had chosen her draperies in New York; others said she had gone only to Pittsburgh but had brought a decorator back with her from there. Great vans bearing crates of new furniture arrived every few days. The supposition was that Sally had felt rather tied down during the nursery years in the country, and was now about to indulge her social cravings to the full, the Rockwell children being well grown.

On the 15th of March Meggy, running to answer the postman's ring, received a large square envelope. She fingered it in surprise, before she opened it. It looked like a wedding invitation. When the words within met her gaze she could not believe the testimony of her eyes. Mr. and Mrs. A. MacTay were indubitably invited to a reception at the home of Mr. and Mrs. E. B. Rockwell on the evening of April the first.

When Alex got home that night Meggy flung herself upon him, the priceless bit of paper in her hand. Alex read it, then threw up his head, his eyes glowing.

"Ah, it's McKelvey's done it, I doubt, though I never expected it. Let's have another look at it! Aye, it says us plain enough."

They were both nervously hilarious over the supper table.

"Did you ever think when you married me, Meggy, I'd be takin' you out among the big bugs so soon?"

"Oh, Alex, I can't believe it! I must go home soon and get Mother to help me, for I'd have to have a new dress."

"Aye," said Alex with fond masterfulness, "but you'll not be makin' it! We'll be gettin' you the best there is at the store. We might go up to Pittsburgh some day. I'll be needin' one of them monkey suits myself."

Meggy's eyes were wide.

"You mean regular evening clothes? Why, somehow I'd never

thought— Oh, Alex, think of us dressed up like that!" Her eyes were wet with sudden proud tears.

During the intervening days they talked of little else. McKelvey basked in their delight but would say nothing as to his part—if any—in procuring the invitation.

"Aren't you an important man now in the community?" he would ask Alex.

He gave them all the advice he could as to the amenities of the occasion. On the subject of Alex's clothes he was sure; upon that of Meggy's he had some doubts.

"But they can help you at the store," he assured her. "Take her up to Pittsburgh to Horne's, Alex. They'll know what's what."

So Alex took a day off—unprecedented in itself—explaining with the faintest bit of side to Pat and Gilly that he had "to be gettin' Meggy some new duds for this Rockwell affair."

Pat was as usual delighted without envy at his friend's good fortune.

"Wisha, Alex, if you ain't takin' the world a bit aiser, an' it's glad I am for it. Flyin' your kite as high as the Rockwells, eh? Well, it'll be suitin' you. For me, now, I'd rather be foldin' little Pat's didies than goin' to the biggest shindig in the land. Did I tell you he's got a tooth now? Lord love him!"

When Meggy stood arrayed in a low-cut evening dress at Horne's, Alex had a strange expression on his face.

"Don't you like me in it?" she inquired anxiously, lowering her voice. She was surprised at his frown, for the mirror told her plainly that her bare white shoulders were beautiful.

"Aye," said Alex, "I like you fine in it myself, but I'm not sure I want other men to see you like that."

The salesgirl came back again, smiling. It was not often she had so pretty and so docile a customer.

"Isn't it lovely on her, sir? And the price so reasonable."

"Is them the kind of dresses all the ladies would be wearin' to an evenin' reception?" Alex asked.

"Yes, indeed. It's a proper evening dress, and so becoming. Blue's her color, isn't it?"

The dress was a taffeta, with small sleeve puffs below the dropped shoulders. The skirt was looped at either side with tiny bunches of artificial flowers, and there was a ruffled bustle and train.

Meggy's cheeks were scarlet with excitement as she turned back and forth before the mirror. Then she walked slowly over again to Alex, raising her eyes to his.

"It's so pretty. Do you think—I could take it?"

A thrill ran through Alex's body. For the first time since their marriage Meggy was asking him for something she greatly desired. All the stress and strain of his toiling had been for this moment.

"We'll take it," he announced shortly to the salesgirl. "An' maybe there might be something else she's needin'."

Back at home that night Meggy must put it on again with Alex's strong fingers struggling with hooks and eyes. Then Alex dressed too in the new "monkey suit"; and when she saw him thus arrayed Meggy sank down in a chair, forgetting her own finery.

"You'll be the handsomest man there!"

"An' you'll be the bonniest woman!"

They practiced entering the room, bowing to imaginary guests, sitting down gracefully—the hardest of all, for Alex's stiff shirt bosom and Meggy's train seemed at times diabolically intractable. Then they would relax, looking at each other with eyes warm and bright, and lips young with laughter. They talked of little else than the reception now in the evenings; and through the day Meggy sang more blithely, and Alex held his head a little higher. McKelvey was scarcely less interested. He dropped in frequently to look again at the new gown and drop another word of advice about the devious ways of society.

The 1st of April dawned with a misty rain, which by late afternoon turned to a fine snow. McKelvey had arranged to stop

for them in a carriage, explaining that people did not go afoot to a party in evening clothes.

"It's a good job we have you to put us right," Alex said. "When it's just up the hill here, we'd have walked it, like as not."

They had an early supper, which Meggy in the last throes of excitement could not touch. Though Alex made large pretenses of being calm, Meggy could see by a thousand signs that he was equally nervous.

"If only the folks at home could see us starting out!" she said.

"Aye, an' my folks too. They'd think we were far in, an' no mistake."

"It just shows, Alex, that you are an important man already. That's what Uncle Andy says!"

"Oh, he's just bletherin'," Alex tried to disclaim it modestly.

They hurried to put the dishes away, Alex wiping them and dropping one in his haste. It was a pretty bit of china, one of Meggy's wedding gifts, but now with the great pleasure of the evening so imminent, neither of them paid much attention to the loss of the plate.

They dressed early—so early that the very last touches to hair, gown, tie and suit had been given long before the appointed hour. They sat then in their small parlor, contemplating each other with rapturous admiration, starting each time there was the sound of wheels.

"I feel so queer in these high-heeled slippers," Meggy said. "But aren't they pretty? Alex, couldn't we go home on Sunday and take our party clothes along and dress up to show them?"

"We'll do it," he said. "We'll not let them see us till we just come in sudden on them an' give them a startle."

"Oh, I'm so happy! We never thought this time a year ago—"

"Them wheels stopped! It must be McKelvey!"

It was. He explained that there was still plenty of time as he looked them over, his eyes tender. Then he produced a small

box which he gave into Meggy's hands. She opened it wonderingly to discover a delicate bouquet of rosebuds.

"For you to carry on this great occasion," he said. "You don't mind, do you, Alex? I knew Meggy long before you did."

She gave him a little kiss on his sallow cheek, and her delight warmed his heart. Then she showed him again how she could manage her train, Alex received last instructions about his shirt-front, and in a final burst of laughter and high spirits they left the little brick house and entered the carriage which waited at the curb.

"I wish my heart didn't beat so fast," Meggy said once on the way.

"At least," McKelvey told her smiling, "your cheeks don't need any rouge."

There was a line of carriages already along the street near the Rockwell mansion, which now stood out from the darkness flooded with lights. Meggy peering from her side saw elegantly gowned women ascending the wide steps.

"They're all in their bare heads!" she exclaimed, jerking off her three-cornered fascinator. "Oh, I hope my old cape won't look funny as I go in!"

"You'll be takin' it right off," Alex assured her. "An' I doubt none of them can beat your dress!"

They were going up the steps at last, across the wide portico, into the bright, bright hall.

"Upstairs and to the right," the butler told the ladies. "Gentlemen to the left, please."

In the large bedroom with its heavy furniture and rich carpet Meggy felt very small and strange. She hurried to remove her cloth cape, seeing other women laying aside silks and velvets. There was a bright chatter going on about her and a surge toward the large mirrors. Meggy edged forward too, and finally caught a glimpse of herself. To her surprise the new gown, seen among the others, did not look so impressively perfect as it had done at home. She realized now, what she had faintly suspected

in the store, that it was a bit too large for her. Then her own delight in it and the salesgirl's assurances had overborne her doubt.

But she saw something else as the other women touched their hair with white fingers. Her own hands were reddened and chapped from much scrubbing and polishing in the new house! She had never given them a thought before. Did not every woman's hands grow red and a little rough during the winter? But she saw now that this was not the case.

She smoothed her own hair. It, at least, looked as well as anyone's and honestly prettier than most. If someone would speak to her it would make her feel less queer. But no one did. More and more women were coming in, while a steady stream moved out of the room and down the wide curving stair. Meggy went too, anxiously wondering where Alex and McKelvey were. She saw them, however, before she reached the hall. Alex, very straight and severe, was looking up until his eyes met hers; then he immediately shifted his gaze.

"Well," said McKelvey cheerfully as they joined her, "here we are. We'd better get in line and speak to our host and hostess first; then I'm going to locate some old cronies and sit down somewhere while you young folks wander about and enjoy yourselves."

The full splendor of the house now burst upon them. The great chandeliers threw a soft radiance upon the heavy lace curtains, the rose brocade hangings, the white statues on pedestals, the grand piano, the orchestra in a recess half hidden by palms. Distant glimpses through opened doors revealed a library, intimate sitting rooms, and a dining room with quantities of gleaming silver on a huge sideboard.

But to Meggy the ultimate seal of elegance was set by the fact that all the carpets were covered with white crash! Over this the trains of the ladies' dresses moved with a soft swishing sound, and the men's shiny shoes trod luxuriously.

Now and then McKelvey spoke to someone, introducing Alex

and Meggy. Each time Meggy smiled and murmured something while Alex bowed solemnly, saying nothing at all.

They reached their host and hostess at last. E. B. Rockwell was a short, stout man with gray hair, a florid face and a heavy underlip. His wife was taller than he, slender and dark, with a quick laugh that did not seem forced. Meggy liked Sally Rockwell on sight, noting the elegant cut of her gown and the way her black hair waved away from its parting. She felt, too, the tremendous vitality that seemed to emanate from her.

McKelvey was greeting her familiarly.

"How are you, Sally? You look younger than ever. How do you manage it with those big boys of yours? These are my friends you were kind enough to invite—Mr. and Mrs. Alex MacTay."

Sally's voice was quick, like her movements.

"You still know the nice things to say, Mr. McKelvey. Don't tell anybody here you used to hold me on your knee! It's not fair to you— Oh, how do you do, Mrs. MacTay! So nice of you to come. . . . Mr. MacTay, you know my husband."

E. B. Rockwell had to raise his eyes considerably to meet Alex's. He gave him a sharp, surprised look, and a somewhat stiff smile.

"MacTay? Oh, yes, MacTay! How are you?"

He looked longer at Meggy, but in a moment he was greeting the next comers.

McKelvey was still complacent as they passed on.

"Now," he remarked, "I'm going to introduce you to some more people, and then I'll retire to a corner somewhere and you can drift around and do what you like."

There followed then many introductions, Meggy smiling nervously, Alex bowing stiffly. But each time there seemed nothing further to say after the initial greeting. McKelvey kept up a running thread of whimsical comment as other guests drifted near them and away again.

"Well," he said at last, "I think you've met enough folks now

to keep you going. Don't be bashful. Just go ahead and have a good time. I'm going to sit down to rest my feet. I'll see you later."

And he was gone.

Alex and Meggy stood still where they were. Alex held his arms straight at his sides like a soldier on parade; Meggy fingered her bouquet, trying to conceal her chapped hands behind it. She watched the crowd while the smile upon her face became fixed in stiff, strained lines. Her quick woman's instinct detected in the other guests a certain indescribable ease of manner. Even strangers like themselves had it, for she had spotted some here and there as they were being introduced. But these did not stand awkwardly silent thereafter; they were at once absorbed by the group. They too, even though strangers, seemed to possess some elusive knowledge shared by all; some code of behavior so sensitive, so delicate as to escape definition. Yet it was there. Meggy felt it.

She glanced swiftly at Alex's face. He was watching the scene intently. She could not tell whether or not his heart was feeling suddenly heavy as her own was. Waves of pleasant sound swept her; light, assured voices; laughter that was gay and confident. All the other men and women were really playing a great game, the rules and manner of which she and Alex did not know. And as long as they did not know, they were on the outside, alone and lonely.

She touched his arm.

"Could we—maybe— Let's move around a little, don't you think?"

"Aye. Let's be movin' round a little."

E. B. Rockwell was not to be seen now, and Mrs. Rockwell was going swiftly from group to group, her laugh ringing above the others. Alex and Meggy made their way slowly through the crowded drawing room, through the crowded hall and finally into the library. This, too, was filled with people. Meggy tried to smile brightly as she went. She even ventured a timid remark

or two as they passed people to whom McKelvey had introduced them, but the effort was lost and futile.

Suddenly, as they edged toward the corner of the big room, a slender young man with brown eyes and an appearance of elegance clapped Alex on the shoulder.

"As I live and breathe," he said, his eyes dancing, "if here isn't my serious-minded friend Mac—Mac— What's the rest of it? I only know it's Scotch and you wouldn't live up to it!"

"MacTay's the name," Alex said shortly, and then he, too, smiled. "I mind you fine now," he added. "Your name's White. I seen you in your father's office in Philadelphia."

"The very same. I knew we'd meet again. Just a case of unfinished business the last time." He was looking at Meggy, whose smile now was unconscious and sweet.

"My wife," Alex said proudly.

Young White bowed over Meggy's hand. His voice was changed and gentle as he spoke.

"I'm very happy to meet you," he said. Then to Alex: "You're lucky in more than the coal business, I see, MacTay. How's it going, by the way? Aren't you rather in the enemy's camp tonight?"

Before Alex could answer there was a stir at the doorway.

"Jack White here? We're looking for Jack White. Hey, there, Jack, we want you to meet some folks out here."

It was a merry crowd evidently. Meggy could see other young men and several girls near her own age crowded together.

"I'm sorry to leave, but I'd better go and quell this disturbance. I shall hope to see you again."

He was gone, leaving a feeling of warmth behind him. They had something now to talk about. Alex told Meggy who he was and where he had first seen him. They both blossomed for a few minutes under the pleasure of having been spoken to, of having found an acquaintance. They looked hopefully about when they had exhausted all comment, but nothing more hap-

pened. Once again the bright currents of talk and laughter flowed by them without touching, without drawing them in.

"We might be movin' round a little," Alex ventured slowly at last.

"Yes," Meggy responded brightly, feeling more pain at the slow doubt gathering in Alex's eyes than at the sinking of her own heart. "Yes, let's move around a little."

They made their way again slowly from room to room, standing sometimes for a few moments looking about them, then going on. There was no sign of McKelvey.

All at once Meggy touched Alex's arm again.

"My feet," she whispered. "They're so tired in these slippers. Couldn't we find a place to sit down? Not here but off somewhere. There must be a little room. . . . If we could just sit down by ourselves for a few minutes—"

"We'll be huntin' a place," Alex said.

It was a large house, deserving the name of mansion frequently applied to it. There seemed to Alex and Meggy no end to the rooms as they continued their search. At last, however, they spied a tiny alcove with a seat at the end of a narrow hallway. They did not see it at first glance because the hall was dimly lighted in contrast to the rest of the house.

"This'll do fine," Alex said.

They were seated upon the sofa and Meggy had removed one painful slipper, keeping her stocking-clad foot well hidden, when a door opened near them and a man came out. He did not see the sofa occupants, but he left the door behind him sufficiently ajar for Alex and Meggy to catch a glimpse of the room he had emerged from. It was evidently a "den," from the appearance of the furniture. Beside the open, roll-top desk, stood E. B. Rockwell with a quart bottle of Overholt whiskey and one none too clean glass that was evidently doing duty for all comers. Three other men were visible.

"Aye, he'll be givin' them a drink," Alex whispered, "off here so the ladies won't know it."

Suddenly, clearly, they heard a man speaking from behind the door.

"I see that young MacTay's here tonight. Looks like a bull in a china shop. How'd you come to invite him, Rockwell?"

Rockwell's face went apoplectic.

"Invite him? Hell, I didn't invite him. Andy McKelvey got round Sally. That's how. Why, the damned young upstart with the old-country mud still stickin' to his boots! I'm just waiting till he goes broke to take him over!"

"Who's the girl?"

"His wife. Tell you who she is. Daughter of Bill Parkinson. You know. Out by New Salem. Horse trader. Laziest old cuss in four counties."

"Well, I must say Sally's letting down the social bars a bit, isn't she?"

"I tell you *she* didn't know herself. McKelvey got round her. Just said friends of his. She'll be mad as the devil. . . . Say when, Cummings. Here, Cox, here's coffee grains to chew. I looked for cloves out in the kitchen, but I couldn't find the damned things . . ."

For one still, agonized moment neither Alex nor Meggy moved. Then Alex caught her arm.

"Put your shoe on you," he said in a strange low voice. "We'll be leavin' this house as fast as we can get out of it."

Meggy thrust her foot into the slipper and stood up. As she did so they both saw a man disappear quickly down the dim hallway. They knew it was Jack White! So fixed had their eyes been upon the partly opened door they had not seen him approaching.

"He must have heard," Meggy moaned in a whisper. Alex did not answer.

The big bedroom above was empty as Meggy entered. In the great mirror she caught sight of a young face tragic white, which she could not believe was her own. The dress hung limply now and the rosebuds were withered in her hand. She caught up her

old cape, threw it about her and started down the stairs, the dead weight in her breast making her sway a little, the terror of being noticed by the gay crowd below holding back the tears that pressed upon her eyeballs. She tried to look at no one, as though by this means no one would see her. She made her way to the front door blindly. Alex was there.

"Will you please find Mr. Andrew McKelvey an' tell him we've left?" he was saying to the butler.

"I'm—I'm not feeling very well," Meggy put in tremulously.

As the great door was closing upon them a burst of laughter came from the rooms behind, and the warm scent of food and coffee.

The light snow had turned now to a fine, spattering sleet, and there was a chill wind. There was no hope of a carriage since all were already engaged. Alex put his arm around Meggy, shielding her from the storm.

"We'll walk it," he said, and spoke no other word.

They came at last to their own house. Alex turned the key in the lock and they entered, still without speaking. But when they were in the parlor, where they had left a light burning, Meggy saw Alex's face clearly for the first time and cried out in her fright. For he looked now as he had done on the day he had fought Harry Dennim. He stood there in the power of his strength, his hands clenched, his eyes flaming, his features locked in a deadly hate, ghastly to see. When he spoke, the words came slowly as though weighed in some inexorable balance.

"I'll ruin E. B. Rockwell if it takes me the rest of my life! I'll break him! I'll rub his nose in the dirt. I'll see him an' all that belongs to him in the gutter. I'm tellin' you now that I'll ruin him if it takes me to the day I die."

"Don't—don't talk that way, Alex," Meggy cried hysterically.

"I'll break him as sure as my name's MacTay. I'll never forgive him for this night till I own the Rockwell mine. Then I can laugh in his teeth."

They went up to their own room and began to prepare for

bed. After his terrible speech below, Alex said nothing. Meggy with the stony weight in her breast took off the dress that had been bought in joy, shook the dampness from the hem and laid it carefully over a chair. For herself she could think of no way to ease the shame, the bitter disappointment in her heart. It was not even as though one of them had been humiliated and the other could have burst out now in words of comfort and vindication. They had both been humiliated, each in the presence of the other. The young upstart with the old-country mud upon him and the horse trader's daughter had been alike unwelcome.

She could not know that as she stood now for a moment by the window in her long white nightgown, her golden hair hanging loose, her face young and white with her distress, she was beautiful with a tender beauty that wrung the heart. But Alex, watching her, knew it.

The light was put out at last, and they lay side by side, tense and unspeaking. Even when Meggy jumped up to put the precious faded rosebuds in the washbowl in the hope that they might revive, Alex could not give voice to his love of her. His pride, all the native dignity of his character had been wounded too deeply.

As the hours wore on, Meggy thought of the broken wedding dish. It grieved her now. She thought piteously of all the evenings when they had prepared for the great event. When she had kept saying, "It's because you're such an important man, Alex." And he had replied, "You'll be the prettiest woman there an' in the finest dress!" They hurt now beyond bearing, all these memories. The thought of their joy before was even harder to endure than the recollection of the conversation in Rockwell's den.

When it was nearly morning Meggy began to weep. No sobs like these had shaken her since her wedding day. At once she felt Alex's arms around her, but still speech seemed impossible.

"It all wouldn't matter so much," Meggy lay thinking. "Noth-

ing else would ever matter to me if I just had a baby. Maybe if Alex only wanted it more—maybe it would make a difference . . .”

At last, just before they fell asleep, Alex said slowly, “What happened tonight, mind, is never to be spoke of again. It’s behind us, now.”

During the next month, as the coke ovens continued to light the summer sky, a new worry assailed the Scotia Coal Company. Week after week Alex journeyed to Pittsburgh with a bag filled with gray cylindrical samples of his new product. Coke could not be marketed until it was made; but, by an even more irrefutable bit of business logic, coke could not go on being made unless it was marketed. Alex now gave his days and nights to this problem. In every particular his coke was worthy of a purchaser. He had sweated in argument with Gilly over this.

“We’ve got to make the best furnace coke on the market,” he kept reiterating. “We’ve got to get our name up for that.”

But though he worked tirelessly to secure a good contract, the weeks went by, the piles of unsold coke grew higher at the mine, and a cloud settled upon him in spite of his unconquerable will. In the evening Meggy plied him with new supper dishes, told him brightly all the little news of her day and then listened, her love yearning over him, as he went over again the story of the coke and the approaching crisis.

She had formed the habit of driving out to the mine with him frequently during the summer to spend the day with Kathleen and her baby. These visits were deeply refreshing to Meggy. She felt at home in the little gray “company” house with its two simple rooms below and above. She and Kathleen spent long hours in happy woman talk; they pieced quilts, embroidered doilies, played with little Pat, and exchanged recipes and young wives’ confidences. It was these visits that helped Meggy to keep brave during the months when Alex’s eyes were far away and anxious and even his steady temper grew edgy at times.

It was a black day indeed when he came home late to tell her they had put out some of the ovens! Since he had started the business this was the first retrogression. She knew by his face what it had cost him, for if the project of the coke failed the whole business was threatened. The investment had been heavy, and notes were waiting to be met. She poured around him her worship of him, her faith in him. It would still all come right.

"It's got to," he said between his teeth. "I'm not done wi' the Pittsburgh Iron & Steel Company yet. They're the ones I want. I've been five times at them, but I'm goin' back next week. I'll never give it up till I see the head man an' show him my samples. Judge Selden says he'll try to put in a good word for me, too."

"You'll get it yet, Alex. Never you fear."

"Aye. I'll get it. It's just a matter of time."

But she knew the strain he was under.

The next week Meggy suddenly began to sing a great deal at her work in spite of the reverses at the mine. She smiled often apparently without cause. On a certain afternoon she did her hair three times before she was satisfied and put on her prettiest blue calico dress with the thistle at her throat. She baked a fresh pie for Alex's supper and laid the table with unusual care.

It was late September, with an autumnal sense of well-being in the air. The tree toads thrummed all day, and the crickets sang far into the night. Meggy loved the sound. It belonged to the fruition and the enfolding security of autumn. Through the open door she could detect a seasonal fragrance. It was heavier on the farm with the wind blowing from the orchard; but even here there was a hint of the first burnt leaves and the haze with its warm, earthy dust. Meggy smiled. Even if she were blind she would recognize the smell of September. October's was still richer and was yet to come. The procession of the months wound itself in her mind, and her lips curved again happily.

As soon as Alex entered the house, she knew something had

happened. His head was up, his eyes were bright once more, and he rushed through the rooms to lift her off her feet as he used to do.

"I've got it!" he shouted. "Meggy, darling, I've got it! A long-term contract with option of extendin' from Pittsburgh Iron & Steel! We'll fire all the ovens again tomorrow. We'll be buildin' more! I'll no deny I'm over the moon about it! Why, this will keep us goin' for five years!"

He talked on, walking about the kitchen, following Meggy wherever she went, barely pausing in his tale for her rapturous replies.

"Colonel Selden spoke to them, but I think it was myself done it after all. I wouldn't take no for an answer about seein' Mr. Blair, the top man. I got at him this morning. I showed him my samples. He liked the coke, an' I fair surprised myself talkin' to him. I was clean desperate, you know. I guess I sounded all right to him, for by afternoon we signed the contract. Gilly an' Pat wouldna believe me when I got back. Aye, they're lifted too, I can tell you! Wait till I see McKelvey!"

He swept her into his arms again and sang "Rabin Tamson's Smiddy" at the top of his lungs before he would sit down at the table.

Meggy's cheeks were pure rose, and her eyes so soft and shining they seemed a liquid blue. She listened again during supper to all the story, and all the new plans for the future. Then when they were finished she left her chair and came to him, almost timidly. He drew her to his knee, and she told him her secret then with her cheek against his.

"I almost told you before, but I wanted to be sure. Oh, Alex, I'm so happy!"

It was Meggy's turn now to talk, for she, too, had plans, a thousand of them, little and big. Alex listened and laughed and teased her gently, and all the evening was a burst of joy. When Alex had to do some figuring before he went to bed, Meggy sat on a footstool close to him, feeling his strength, stroking his

knee with her hand, so warm, so secure, so happy in her love, and what it had brought her, as she listened to the quavering tune of the crickets outside the window.

Like the night of the reception, but so unlike it, they did not fall asleep at once. Meggy, lost in her own thoughts, spoke after they had been quiet for some time.

"You're glad about it, aren't you, Alex?" she whispered.

"Glad! Why, it's saved the business! This'll keep us runnin' strong for five years, an' by then I'll be well on my way. Aye, you're right I'm glad!"

Meggy lay very still, almost without breathing. Something delicate and tender in her heart like a first spring flower died in that moment and never lived again. Through the slow hours of the night she reorganized her life.

CHAPTER VI

As THE months rolled on, the joy of her coming motherhood enveloped Meggy in a circle of light. Learning from Alex's habitual phrase, she had put the first pain of adjustment "behind her." She still knew that the coming of the child did not mean as much to him as it did to her; but, to overbalance this, Alex's love for her seemed greater than ever. No task was too little or too big for him to do to save her strength; no personal sacrifice mattered if her health and comfort were assured. This knowledge of the depth of his love and its power over her was as the sure earth upon which Meggy trod. Only occasionally she caught in his eyes a strange look as she spoke of the child.

One night as she sat sewing, the light falling upon her musing face, Alex raised his head from his endless figuring and watched her.

"Mind," he said suddenly, in a low voice, "I'm always to be first."

When the shadows of doubt assailed her, Meggy went for a few days' visit, to the farm, where she was uninhibited as she poured out her dreams for the new life within her own.

Once again the three women sat together in the kitchen with their sewing, while Bill blundered in at intervals to warm himself at the stove. Though he made no direct remark to Meggy about the approaching event, his whole bearing took on new pride. The fact that he had a son-in-law who was going to be rich had already given Bill a slight swagger and a logical reason for exerting himself even less than formerly. He had numberless "errands" now to New Salem and to Greensburg, and he was beginning to dabble again a bit in horseflesh, to Tirzah's distress.

Meggy rejoiced in these visits. She went out frequently to draw long breaths of the fresh wind as it came blowing over the fields; she bundled up warmly and went to the shed at milking time, sniffing the familiar odors of the animals and the hay; she fell asleep at night watching the drowsy flickering of the shadows from the banked coal fire in the grate as they played upon the walls of her bedroom.

By early spring, Alex's mind was taken up with a new problem. The price of coke had suddenly soared. According to the terms of his contract with Pittsburgh Iron & Steel he must now sell his product much below the market quotation. This was a situation upon which he had not reckoned. He and Gilly talked it over far into the night.

"Rockwell was caught that way once," Gilly said, "an' he slid out of it like a greased eel."

"How was that, again?"

"Why, he just slighted his contract orders. Kept puttin' them off or shippin' smaller amounts to them while he sold most of it to outside markets at a bigger price."

"Aye, that's the way he'd be doin'. But I'm wonderin', Gilly, if that's good business. I'm for goin' right ahead, fulfillin' our contract to the letter even if we lose money on it the now. It's the time to come I'm lookin' at."

"I think you've got the pig by the right end myself," Gilly announced after reflection. "I was just tellin' you the way Rockwell used to do."

Suddenly Alex sprang to his feet.

"I've got an idea," he said. "Rockwell has a good contract now with Pittsburgh Iron & Steel, hasn't he?"

"Sure," said Gilly. "Least he had when I left him."

"Well, he'll be up to his old tricks now, won't he? He'll be skimpin' it! Don't you see? This'll give me my first crack at him."

Alex's eyes were flashing, and his countenance not altogether pleasant to see.

"I'll fill every order to the last pound if coke goes up to fifty dollars a ton! I'll fill them if I have to fire every oven myself. Then when this boom's over, you'll see me stealin' Rockwell's contract right under his nose from Pittsburgh Iron & Steel! Mind, I see the whole thing clear as water now."

Gilly's eyes narrowed, then opened wide with wondering admiration.

"Damn it, Alex! You weren't born on a Sawbath!"

On the 10th of May the little brick house had a third tenant. Meggy's child was born in the late afternoon of a sunny spring day. She had wavered in her deep desires between a boy and a girl. Alex might be more pleased over a boy. He had said he wanted a son for the business; but on the other hand a little girl might catch his fancy more. In the end her array of arguments on each side was so formidable, and so confusing, that she was glad the decision was in the hands of Providence.

When her mother whispered to her at last, "It's a boy," she did not know whether to be glad or sorry for Alex's sake. For herself it did not matter. The little warm, moving body of their own flesh in her arms was all she asked. How strange that anyone should care what its sex!

But Alex, at that moment, was unquestionably glad and proud. He had been frantic with his fears for Meggy. Now that she lay smiling and the anxious voices of Tirzah and the doctor had relaxed to reassurance and mild chaffing, Alex drew an immense breath of relief and looked at his son.

"Aye, you caused plenty trouble, littlin'," he said, peering at the bundle.

But when he came back to Meggy his eyes were tender and deep. He would of course say nothing now of his own anguish at her pain, and the love of her that tore at him as he watched her white face against the pillows. That would be later when no one was near. But he did say in a voice which he tried to keep even and casual, "He's a strong-lookin' bairn, mind." And Meggy was content.

Indeed she had never been happier than as she lay listening to the evening notes of the robins in the maple tree outside; feeling the surcease of her travail, watching her mother move about in her quiet sure way, while the baby lay in the old cradle brought from the farm attic, and Alex sat beside her with the pleased look still in his eyes.

Later in the evening he said: "I'd better be writin' to them at home about this. I guess I'll do it the now when I've got time. I've been a bit lax about writin' lately."

"Yes, you must let them know right off. Your mother will be pleased about the name."

For the child was to be called Ranald for Alex's grandfather, the father of Marget, whose home had been on the Galloway moors.

All through the month of May, Meggy gained strength slowly while Tirzah stayed to watch over her and the baby. Bill turned up every few days, for once under the blessing of Mrs. Mac-Intosh, who found his reports better than none at all in these days of her yearning to see the child. McKelvey haunted the house, doing all the small things which never occurred to Alex. He brought rattles of every description, a small china cat and a little red ball. He brought a Mexican dollar for the cutting of teeth later, and a silver spoon engraved *Ranald, May 10, 1894*.

It was seeing him and Pat with the baby that brought back the small pain to Meggy's heart. They both begged to hold him as soon as they entered the house. They carried him, they talked to him, they played with him. When either of them was present there was but one subject of discussion, and that the one closest to Meggy's heart.

But with Alex it was different. When he came home in the evenings he looked at the baby, made a small show sometimes of tickling him gently, then seemed to dismiss him from his thoughts. He rarely held him except when Meggy placed the child in his arms. In the evenings he worked longer than ever over his plans since Meggy had her mother to sit with her.

For one thing Meggy was deeply grateful as the summer came and passed: the small Ranald was what is known as a "good" baby. He slept peacefully and well; he thrived and grew in normal fashion; their nights were not disturbed by infant wails, and Alex's routine, at least, was the same as it had always been.

While the early months of the coke boom were in some degree a source of bitterness because of the thought of what the shiny gray columnar chunks might have brought in an open market, Alex adhered steadfastly to his plan. Every order of the Pittsburgh Iron & Steel Company was delivered promptly and in full at the price specified. Old Colonel Selden looked at Alex shrewdly one day as he sat in his office for one of his periodic reports.

"David Blair of Iron & Steel was in here yesterday. He seems to think he made a pretty good dicker with you on the coke contract. It's pinching you a bit though now, eh?"

"It might be, a little," Alex returned.

"But you're going ahead: full order, no hedging."

"Aye."

"Right," said the Colonel. Then he leaned nearer, his keen old eyes twinkling.

"Matter of ethics, Alex, or good business? Which?"

Alex gave the faint smile the Colonel had come to know. It belonged to the financiers of his generation.

"I might come out a pinch ahead in the long run," he said.

The Colonel smiled too. He knew his man. "I'll bet you will," he said. "Any new plans?"

"Aye, I've got a one, but not just for the now. It'll be several years belike, before I can work it. But I'm thinkin' it over."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not at the present."

The Colonel laughed though Alex saw no cause for amusement.

"All right," the old banker nodded. "In your own words you'll just have to 'gang your ain gait,' I suppose."

"Aye," said Alex. Then at the door he turned. "I was goin' to tell you that we—that I have a son."

The Colonel rose to his feet. "Well, well!" he exclaimed, grasping Alex's hand. "Why, that's fine! Congratulations! When did this happen?"

"May the tenth."

"Well, well! I'm delighted. Going to make a coal man of him?"

"That's what I'm thinkin'. It's good for a man to have a son to take into the business with him."

"If the son will go."

"An' why wouldn't he?"

The Colonel shrugged. "In my rather wide experience I've noticed that sons do not always go the way their fathers map out for them."

"I'll see that mine does!" Alex said smiling, but his voice had a determined ring as he said it.

For a year the price of coke kept up. Gilly at times begged for a faint modification of Alex's policy, but he was not to be moved. Then suddenly the market changed. Coke dropped to their contract price and even fell below it. When several months had passed and it looked as though things were stable, Alex was sent for by David Blair. Pittsburgh Iron & Steel were pleased with his manner of filling their contract. They would be glad to double their order from now on as they were not renewing certain other contracts that were soon to expire.

"Might I put one question to you, sir?" Alex asked.

"Certainly."

"Is it E. B. Rockwell's contract that has expired?"

"His is one."

"That's all I wanted to know."

"Rivals, eh?"

"You might be callin' us that."

"Well, that's the life of trade. All right, MacTay. Keep the quality up, and we'll continue to do business with you. Are you expanding out there?"

"We're buildin' more ovens this summer," Alex said calmly, settling the matter in that moment. "An' in a year, mebbe, we're startin' a new mine. I've been buyin' up land on the quiet. You have to keep away ahead of your workin's in this business unless you want to be blocked some day, an' I don't intend to be blocked."

"That's right, MacTay. Well, we like the way you do business. Good luck to you."

It was such big news that after discussing it at the mine they all—Alex, Gilly and Pat—went into Greensburg to see McKelvey. They swarmed over his office, kicking the spittoon, upsetting chairs, sitting on the littered desk while McKelvey produced a bottle from the lower drawer by way of celebration.

Pat drained his glass at an easy gulp, and, as a good Irishman, paid his first respects to his refreshments.

"Ah, if me mother had nursed me on that, I wouldn't be weaned yet," he said, bowing to McKelvey. Then with his irrepressible spirits he pushed Alex back against the wall.

"Look at him! Look at *himself* here! Faith, an' he'll be a millionaire before you can say trapsticks! The coke order doubled an' a crack at Rockwell all done up as safe an' tidy as if he had it all the time in his waistcoat pocket. Sure, the saints are blessin' him even if he is a heretic!"

Gilly wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "It's the luck of him!" he pronounced slowly. "Never a seerious setback. Always gettin' ahead. Didn't he tell me out by the washer there one day, he says, 'Gilly,' he says, 'I'll steal Rockwell's contract from him,' he says, an' by God he's done it! Did you ever know such luck, sir?"—appealing to McKelvey.

McKelvey said nothing for a moment and then squinted off over their heads.

"Luck?" he said as though weighing the matter. "Well, maybe a little. But you'd better remember this, boys, that the wind is always on the side of the ablest navigators—eh, Alex?"

Suddenly, as was his ability, Alex put aside the chaffing, the friendly wrestling with Pat, the whole attitude of easy celebration. In an instant he stood before them tight-lipped and stern.

"Expansion," he said. "That's what we've got to be thinkin' of now. We'll be buildin' a new string of ovens this summer."

There was some exclaiming and discussion, but Alex paid no attention to it.

"An' that ain't all. I've been thinkin' for a long time now that we've got to start a new works!"

McKelvey sprang to his feet.

"You young lunatic! We couldn't possibly swing another plant. It'd ruin us. What's wrong with you, Alex? You've got your hands full now, and you're doing fine. Don't let this present success turn your head."

For a second Alex's face lighted.

"What's that about navigatin' again?"

McKelvey was too much in earnest to smile.

"I'm too old a man to take any more chances. I've worried enough over this mine, and now I'm just beginning to sit comfortable. Count me out on anything further."

"All right," Alex said. "When I do it, I'll do it on my own. But that's the way the wind's pullin' me."

"Who'd run it?" asked Gilly.

"I'd make you General Superintendent of Scotia. Pat an' me'd start the other an' get a new man to help us. We'd start up over on the Johnston farm an' work east."

When they left the office at last McKelvey felt older than usual and overruled. Youth would have its way, and perhaps he should have gone the full length with it. Who could tell? On the other hand he had no one to whom to leave it and, as he reminded himself in his bath, "the last garment is made without pockets."

As Alex reached his own home that evening his thoughts were extremely buoyant. A great surge of power swept him. There was the first victory over Rockwell to make his heart swell with satisfaction; there was the new contract; ahead of him stretched the development of more ovens and ultimately of the second mine. He was twenty-seven years old now, and if things went along as he proposed to make them his goal at thirty-five would be accomplished. He whistled as he went up the walk, later than usual, but confident of the peace and happiness that waited for him in the little brick house. The child Randal was a year old now, a fine, healthy little chap, with soft light hair and eyes neither blue nor brown. The eyes, the features, the whole expression of his small face resembled neither Alex nor Meggy, but were instead almost startlingly those of his grandmother Marget of Lamson Green.

Alex went around to the back door and opened it, still whistling. He could hear Meggy above with the baby. But as she started down the stairs her feet did not hurry as they usually did. She came up to him slowly, and as he kissed her he could feel that there was a chill upon her.

"There was a letter came today from the old country," she said, standing very still when he set her down from his embrace.

"Ah, that's good. I must mind now to be writin' them. I've been a bit lax aboot that lately. Where is it?"

"On the stand—in the parlor. Alex, it—the envelope—has a black edge on it. I've been afraid—"

He stood still then. So still that Meggy could hear his breath come and go.

"Who backed it?" he asked in a strange voice.

"It's your sister Lizzie's writing."

He went past her and into the parlor. Before him lay the cheap square envelope with its dark border. As he picked it up a trembling shook him. For the first time in his life his whole body seemed rent with fear, for he knew before he opened it what message the letter brought.

Dear Alex—

I have to tell you that Mother died a week ago come Thursday and was buried on the Saturday. She's not been her usual since last New Year and for a month she was poorly but she wouldna have the doctor. I got her a bottle but it done her no good and when we did call him all he could say was she'd just sough away afore morning. She was ay talking about you up to the very last and watching for letters or a bit something from America. She wanted me to send you her love. Father is well but he never speaks hardly. Mr. Whinnery is often in by, and him and me talks about her and that helps me thole it. I hope this finds you and Meggy and the bairn all well as it leaves me at the present. I must stop and write to the other boys. It's hard to set it all down again, but it has to be done.

Your sister,

LIZZIE

Alex read it through and replaced it in the envelope. He heard Meggy behind him and turned.

"It's my mother," he said. Only that.

For he could not yield himself to her anxious comforting, and though he made a pretense of eating at the supper table his throat was tight. As the evening wore on Meggy's voice drifted to silence, and when she was ready to go upstairs she only looked at him questioningly.

"Just go on to bed," he said. "I may be sittin' down here awhile. Just—just let me be awhile, will you, Meggy?"

Meggy went on, and Alex stumbled into the dark parlor and closed the door. He wondered strangely why he could not accept Meggy's comfort; why it even seemed impossible to him to lie this night beside her. He only knew it was so. He sat staring ahead of him, his heart torn as by a literal wound. He had been in America for six years. He saw now that for him, with the novelty of his surroundings, the intensity of his purpose, his unremitting work and the stress and fulfillment of his love, the time had passed like a breath.

But six years in Lamson with each day like to the other days

and Marget's eager eyes ever watching for the posty as he came up the Green! Like a sword of fire his intuitive memory smote him with knowledge of those days as though he had lived them in her presence. He could hear her saying to Lizzie:

"He's busy gettin' settled the now. He'll write all about everything when he's not so throng."

"It's a strange country, mind, an' it takes time to get used to it. We'll be hearin' soon."

"Aye, he's waitin' to write an' send a bit fairing for Christmas—that's it!"

"We'll be hearin' at the New Year belike."

So the years had gone. He knew it now, even as he saw in the darkness Marget's face, uplifted, with the strange light in her eyes as she looked off to the Lammermoors. He saw her as she bent before the old clock packing his kist the night before he left; he saw her as she pressed the gold thistle into his hand; as she waved to him from the door when the cart was making the last turn . . .

But most terribly of all he saw her as she sat at the window watching, watching for the letters and the "bit fairing" from America that never came.

Alex crouched low in his chair, as though pressed there by steel weights. All his life he had held his head high. Back at Lamson he had been the best loved of the family; and in the neighborhood also he had received a sort of homage as the best and handsomest lad on the Green. Here in America he had borne himself well; he had been chaste, industrious; he had married his love with honor and established a business that older men could well envy. Always without dwelling upon it, Alex had been subtly conscious of his own worth, of the fact that he had not deviated from his idea of rectitude.

Now, overpoweringly, devastatingly, he knew that he had been guilty of the greatest sin of all: a sin against love. So incredible it seemed now—his neglect, his thoughtlessness—that for one moment he felt he must fling himself awake from the

nightmare and stand forth whole and altogether commendable again.

But it was true, though it lay upon him like a dark mystery which he would never solve. He had never sent her gifts from America as he had promised. Many long months had passed between his letters. Even when he did write, the message was brief and lacking in all the details she would be craving; and through all the years never the verses for which she had pleaded.

And now to the weight of his remorse was added the hopelessness of expiation. Quietly, without his knowing, his mother had gone beyond all reach of him. Even if he some day became a millionaire as he intended he could do nothing for her. He could give her no gift. Death had closed the door upon her, and not all his power and resolve could bend death to his will.

Alex heard the little clock on the kitchen wall strike the passing hours brightly as though there were no grief in the house. He heard Meggy come once and twice to the stairs to listen, but he did not move from his chair.

His mind kept going over and over the same burden: the world no longer held his mother. That bond which had linked their spirits as surely as Nature had once united their bodies, had been broken. Together they had felt the strange tremors of beauty; it was their eyes that had met and spoken to each other while all the rest of the family were heedless; it was from her he had drawn that part of his nature which he had deliberately tried to kill. And now, she herself was dead.

Always, through all the years in the new country, when he had given her nothing of himself, there had been deep within him the consciousness of her existence, of her being. He had continually drawn from her, as a far-away stream draws from its limpid source. But from now on, when he thought of her, he knew it would be with bitterness and pain. As the darkness gave way at last to a leaden dawn, Alex roused himself and went forth into the small garden. He would write to Lizzie that day, he decided, and send her some money. It was all he could do

now. But why, why had he never thought before at the Christmas or the New Year to send even a pound to his mother? That she might have boasted gently of it to the neighbors; that she might have kept the precious slip in the big Bible on the parlor table, running often to look at it; that she might on one great day have journeyed with Lizzie to Berwick to spend it in pride! Why—oh, insufferable mystery, why had he never thought to do this?

He walked back and forth between Meggy's neat garden beds, his hands clenched. His mother was having her revenge. All unwillingly, she who would have given her life for him was driving the thorns of remorse deeper into his heart. For it was by her own nature's gift to him that his imagination now cruelly pictured the scenes of her eagerness, her disappointments, her patient watching, her resignation at Lamson Green.

When the daylight had really come the child Ranald woke and cried. At the sound Alex shuddered. In his son's face he would always see his mother's to haunt him and remind him.

"I've got to put this behind me," he muttered. "I've got to! I wish right now for a little there was only Meggy and myself—" Then he reproached himself. "The business!" he thought, straightening. "That'll take up my mind. I'll be gettin' after the new coke ovens at once. An' the new works later. Aye, that's the thing to bring me back to myself. The business!"

It was the next evening that Meggy, talking eagerly to fill in the great gaps of his silence, told him a piece of news. Sally Rockwell had a new baby—a daughter! Her boys were all in their teens now, and it was thought that Sally had neither expected nor wanted another child. But a girl! That would make all the difference. People said Mr. Rockwell himself was delighted, but that was only natural as men always were pleased over little girls. (Meggy's voice had a hint of wistfulness in it.) They had named the baby Cynthia, and she thought it was a lovely name. It was strange that the child was just a year almost to the very day younger than Ranald—

Alex suddenly interrupted. His voice was harsh, but Meggy had long since learned that the harshness was never meant for her.

"I'm no' interested in any news of the Rockwell family," he said.

But Meggy kept thinking of the baby in the great house up the hill.

As time passed, the building of the new coke ovens was completed with record speed. This phase of expansion at least, McKelvey agreed, was necessary and wise, though his thoughts during that summer and fall were more absorbed in the political campaign that was going on, and he was likely to interrupt any conversation in order to denounce Bryan and free silver.

"In God we trust,
In Bryan we bust!"

He would rumple his grizzled curls as he quoted and pound the desk vehemently.

"I tell you, Alex, that fellow's a political faker. If McKinley isn't elected and we get this boy orator in the White House, we're done for!"

Alex, fundamentally uninterested in politics, would mutter vague agreements and go on his way, nursing his own private worries.

The Scotia mine with its new string of coke ovens had taken on a look of settled prosperity. The patch now included two long rows of red-painted houses facing each other. Clustering near the tippie were other buildings containing offices, supply rooms, the lamp house, and a carpenter shop where wagons were repaired. There was a long stable, too, for the mules and a rough blacksmith shop. The fact was that both Alex and McKelvey were now making money.

But the fever of expansion was in Alex's bones, even as the matter of keeping production up was his very religion and "Tonnage! tonnage!" his creed. With his farsighted eye he saw

that he was at an industrial crossroads. On the one hand he might content himself with the present prosperity of the Scotia mine, develop it gradually and be all his life a small-fortune coal man. On the other hand, if he could double or treble his present output he would be in a position to make money on a larger scale and to become a producer with whom the big steel companies would eventually have to reckon.

All that summer and fall and through the winter Alex wrestled with his problem. If he developed the new mine he must do it himself, and hazard all he had in the process. Unfortunately he could not even discuss the matter with his mentor, for McKelvey was still bitterly opposed to the project.

With a new June upon them a strange hiatus occurred. Alex sat with Meggy on their front porch in the evenings with the soft smell of the roses and the warmth of the summer air encompassing him as with a fragrant opiate and forgot temporarily the question of the new works. He forgot, too, the past and its bitter regrets. The present suddenly seemed sufficient to itself. Meggy had a new muslin dress with big puffed sleeves and yards of ruffles around the skirt. She was wearing her hair in the Gibson girl style, brushed back from her brow and falling in a loose pompadour with a great "figure eight" at her neck. It gave her face a distinction it had not had before; and something else which Alex did not know had matured it into a finer beauty. This was the fact that, along with her great love for him, her heart held buried disappointment.

Alex's own love, stronger than ever, knew no hidden adjustments. Meggy met and satisfied all his demands, and the full need of his nature. Even his rising pride and social ambition saw a fulfillment in her, for she walked down Main Street these days to do her marketing as stylish-looking as the best of them. Indeed Alex was harboring a secret resolve to buy one of the new tandem bicycles upon which they would ride out together like the big bugs.

It was in these evenings that an unfamiliar and transient con-

tentment settled upon his spirit, and it was in these nights that Meggy forgot the questionings of her own heart. She knew nothing then but the old compelling power of his love.

But one morning early in July, with the summer sun high and the vigor of it in his blood, Alex left the brick house once more with his chin set and his plans churning within his brain.

When he brought it all up again at the mine Gilly was not discouraging though Alex felt his attitude was colored by the fact that the opening of a new works meant a superintendency at Scotia for him. Pat gave his advice as usual, freely and with spirit.

"Wisha, Alex, why can't you keep your hurry in your fist awhile? I don't like the look of this at all, at all. Here you're doin' good an' we're all happy an' contented but yourself, an' you start in lookin' like a dyin' duck in a thunderstorm because you're tryin' to make up your mind about this new-works business. Why don't you forget it an' laugh again like a Christian?"

"If I go ahead with this, Pat, I'll be riskin' every dollar I've got in the world an' be mortgagin' my future besides."

"Then what are you doin' it for, in the name of God?"

For a second Alex looked into the honest eyes of his friend.

"I don't know," he admitted slowly. "It's just the way my judgment's pullin' me. An' I've got to go along with it."

Pat shook his head. "May the Devil admire me if I can make you out! But come on up to the house an' get a bit of hot dinner. Meat an' mass never hindered no man, they say."

On the way over the field Pat spoke again with pride.

"You haven't seen Kathleen lately, so I'd best be tellin' you. There's goin' to be another little Crowdey, glory be to God! An' would you believe it, Bessie the cow's goin' to have a calf the same month! Kathleen's never done laughin' about it. Ach, it's the lucky man I am, Alex!"

The next week Alex announced his decision. He would start work on the new mine at once.

Since this time the most important matter was to reach pro-

duction point as soon as possible, Alex hired an engineer at the start. He had succeeded in getting a sizable loan from Colonel Selden; he had mortgaged his Scotia stock, and was expecting to draw upon all his cash reserves in the bank. He was taking up two options at once and at least two more would need to be raised in a year's time.

"It'll be titch an' go, I'm fearin'," Alex said to himself with his teeth set. "But a man's got to take chances."

From the first it seemed as though an ill fate pursued the project of the new mine, which Alex had decided to call the "Magnus." There were unexpected delays. The engineer he had engaged developed typhoid and had to be replaced by another, a young man whose native stubbornness clashed often with Alex's own. Pat, who had rarely known a day's illness in his life before, was off work for two weeks. One carload of timbers proved the wrong size and a sudden fall of draw slate later injured no one but held up construction.

McKelvey, relieved in spirit by McKinley's election, was ready enough now to talk about the new mine but still, half embarrassed, proclaimed his unwillingness to throw his financial support into it. Alex again was working beyond his strength, in spite of everybody's advice.

"You're takin' it out of your own body," Pat adjured him often. "You'll have to pay the piper some day, my lad."

For, with all the anxieties of the new development, Alex still remained in close touch with the old. He was not supposed now to take part in the actual physical work himself—though at odd moments he would put his shoulder to a laging as readily as ever. He now directed the affairs of both mines from an office desk and continued to be the salesman. The stress of these responsibilities and the weight of his consuming ambition were harder upon him than the old steady shoveling and digging and wrestling with timbers had ever been.

Meggy noticed that a few gray hairs were showing at his temples and the lines ran deeper in his face. She was familiar now

with the daily terms of the business. Entries, cut-throughs, brattices—she knew them all, listening to Alex's account of his day. His evenings were usually spent over detailed records and estimates.

But while the clean, fierce upheaval of his passion for her still bore her with it with a resistless ecstasy, she had hours of loneliness and weariness of spirit. The brick house still vibrated to Alex's presence, but it never seemed to relax in peace when he was within it. Neither did Meggy. Always now there was a hidden tension, a stress which came with him from the mine, and crouched in the shadow of his chair.

She was most conscious of this after one of her occasional visits to Kathleen. In the small gray company house there was no tension. Pat's coming home from work was the signal for general relaxation. There was laughter and chaffing and inordinate noise and monkeyshines between Pat and his small son. Kathleen fussed over them both lightheartedly, scolding and caressing them alternately and averring, "There's no telling which of you's the biggest baby, now that's certain!"

Kathleen was blooming like a wild rose, happy in the fruition of her body, content with the homely comfort and mirth which surrounded her. Meggy liked to go with her to see their cow, to feed the chickens, to gather the eggs. She felt like weeping when Kathleen once allowed her to churn, for a wave of longing swept her, a homesickness not for the act itself but for the lightheartedness that used to accompany it. She wanted to take Ranald home to the farm for a real visit, but she could not bear to leave Alex to the cold cheer of the empty house just then when he needed her help and comfort. She had been most aware of the stress of his spirit lately, for once when she was brushing his coat a bit of paper had dropped from the inner pocket. Evidently it had been culled from an old almanac. Upon the words which were underlined and soiled from much reading, Meggy's eyes dwelt:

Success born of tears, fighting and struggle is likely to last a man's full life. For such things is the price fortune demands.

Meggy stood still, the paper wavering in her hand. There was a price, then, for what Alex was determined to have. He knew it and was willing to pay. But was she?

Suddenly she sank down on a chair, her head upon the kitchen table, the tears coming in a flood, tears that she knew now she had been holding back for months. She was mourning for something lost and indefinable; some inner hope of joy complete; something delicate and free that was now fettered.

At last she raised her head. She was still holding Alex's coat. The smell of the mine clung to it, and the odor of his pipe. Even as an empty garment it was redolent of its owner and seemed to hold in its very texture something of his strength. Meggy smoothed it gently, a slow smile breaking through her tears as it had done on her wedding morning.

"I love him," she whispered. "No matter what happens, I'll always love him."

It was not long after this that she discovered what she told herself was the real reason for the tears, the doubts and the moments of loneliness. She confided her suspicions some weeks later to Kathleen, and then to her mother and Mrs. MacIntosh when she drove to the farm for a day's stay.

The old lady nodded her head complacently.

"The bairn here will be near three when the new one comes. Aye, that's good spacin'. You couldn't expect better. I s'pose Alex's pleased."

Meggy flushed. "I haven't told him yet. He's having so much trouble with the new mine. Things always seem to be going wrong, and of course he's bothered and anxious. I—I almost hate to tell him. He's not as fond of children as some men. I don't know how he'll take it—"

Her voice suddenly broke, and the tears overflowed. She had never meant to say it. The words came out of her sealed heart against her will.

"He pays so little attention to Ranald. He never romps with him or talks to him, and he's always telling me to keep him away while he's busy; and sometimes at the table when Ranald looks up at him Alex just acts as if he almost didn't want to see him. I can't understand it—it grieves me!"

Then she caught herself up hastily. "Oh, I shouldn't have said that when Alex's so good to me always. I'm ashamed I said anything. It just came before I knew it!"

The two older women exchanged a quick glance.

"You must mind," Tirzah said gently, "that a man with all the business on his shoulders that Alex has, can't help but be worried."

"An' there's some men never make much over bairns," the old lady put in hastily. "As to takin' his work seerious, there's some others would do well to have a lesson from that." The latter remark was addressed to Bill who was coming in to dinner.

As a matter of fact Bill was full of a tremendous excitement just then, and a new and swaggering importance. On his last "errant" to Greensburg a few days before, he had dropped into the Zimmerman House, and had there been introduced to a handsome gentleman of rare conversational powers, freshly arrived from Nebraska.

"We was all just settin' there chewin' the rag," he explained now to Meggy, "when this here fellah comes in an' walks up to the desk. Doggone me if I ever seen a handsomer fellah or one with a voice like he's got. You could tell right away he was some punkins. Well, he registered an' he says to the clerk, says he, 'Do you happen to know of any horse dealers hereabouts?' he says. 'There's one right here now,' says the clerk, an' he pointed to me."

Bill cleared his throat loudly and glanced impressively toward his mother-in-law, who refused to look up from her knitting.

"So the clerk introduces me, an' I get the whole story. His name's Berger. O. P. Berger. Got a big ranch out in Nebraska

an' raises these here fine Western blooded horses. Well, he ast my advice right off, an' I just took him in tow an'—"

"I'll bet he's a blatherskite!" Mrs. MacIntosh put in.

"You just wait!" Bill said with dignity. "I've got the chance of my life, an' I ain't goin' to miss it. What he's doin', he's shippin' a whole carload of these fancy horses to Greensburg an' goin' to sell them at auction. His son's bringin' them on. An' if it wasn't a streak of luck me bein' in the hotel there the day he come, then I'm a Chineer! You see we're just hand in glove now as you might say. I took him up to Coshey's an' introduced him round, an' then we rented that old empty livery stable back of the church to house them in when they come an' I told him where to order hay an' a load of shavin's for the floor an' so on—"

"An' what are you goin' to get out of it, I'd like to know," his ancient enemy inquired.

"Me?" Bill spoke with a patient condescension that set the old lady's nose twitching. "Well now, I'll tell you. When the auction comes off, O. P.—that's what I call him now—O. P.'s goin' to tip me off which is the best buy. He says I ought to be able to make fifty dollars a horse tradin' them. Wouldn't I like to get my hands on some real blooded Western horseflesh though!"

"I do wish, Bill, you would let horse trading go for good," Tirzah said anxiously.

"How many are you thinkin' of buying?" Mrs. MacIntosh asked acidly.

"Oh, that depends," Bill returned evasively with a side glance at Meggy.

He had at various times asked Meggy or Alex to lend him small sums. They had talked the matter over together between his frequent calls. Meggy loved her father's presence in the brick house. He never stayed long, but he brought all the news of home and of the farm neighborhood. He was devoted to the child Ranald to the point of worship, and Meggy knew his love

of her was beyond any words of his to express it. So Bill appeared at the kitchen door at odd hours, had a cup of tea beside the stove while he repeated the messages that had been laid upon him; then Meggy, talking very fast, poured out all her stock of news for the two women waiting at the farm. Indeed, in all his life Bill had never been so free from reproaches over his trips to town. When he reached his own kitchen again after each of these calls the old lady declared a truce until she had extracted from him in minutest detail all that concerned Meggy and the child.

When Meggy had talked over with Alex the matter of lending money to Bill, she had tried to make all this clear to him.

"Let him have it," Alex had decided at last. "As long as he doesn't ask you too often or for too much."

"I got ideas," Bill went on now with an expansive air. "But what I'm wantin' most is to see them horses. O. P.'s havin' big posters made announcin' the sale. I took him up an' introduced him at the printin' office. Tomorrow I've got to go in an' help him put them up. We're getting all the horse dealers in the county rounded up to be on hand when the carload gets in."

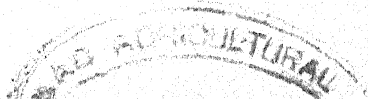
"When's it comin'?" inquired the old lady.

"Well, we can't tell exact. O. P. says he thinks it ought to be here now in about a week. I may," he said to Meggy, "be wantin' to stay in with you one night if we get word they're gettin' in early in the morning or late at night."

"Of course," Meggy agreed heartily. "There's always a place for you."

"The thing you don't any of you seem to realize," Bill said irritably as he finished his dinner, "is that O. P. Berger is a big man. They all say round town that he's just took everybody by storm, he's that smart. An' here I'm the one he's leanin' on, you might say. I'm the one that's closetest to him, advisin' him. You don't any of you 'pear to take that in at all."

"I think it's fine, Father," Meggy said quickly. "It's just wonderful."



Tirzah said nothing, but Mrs. MacIntosh sniffed audibly.

"Well, supposin' you are well in with him, I wouldn't go blowin' about it!"

As Meggy drove back that day through the late afternoon sunshine with little Ranald on the seat beside her, holding the ends of the reins contentedly, she felt that the visit had done her good. The very smell of the farm revived her as did nothing else. September again ran its warm path of fruitage over the hills and fields, and she herself was fecund even as the rich earth she loved. She would tell Alex her news that night, for the weeks and months went so quickly. She looked down tenderly at the child beside her. He was a strong, handsome boy, but with no feature discernible of his father's except the implacable chin. His brow, his hair, his eyes, the quickly changing expression of his lips belonged neither to Alex nor to her.

"Is he like any of your people?" she had asked Alex once.

"Aye," he had answered briefly, and seemed unwilling to say more.

Ah, well, Meggy thought, drawing him close to her, from whomever it came, the lad had both beauty and strength in his face. And now there was hope for a little girl.

But she did not tell Alex that night after all. He came home exhausted and discouraged. Water had broken in on them and was going to necessitate more pumps.

"Nothing's goin' right," he said in a flat tone new to him. "Will you just leave me be a bit tonight, Meggy, till I get this thing figured out?"

It was rather a relief to Meggy to receive Bill's excited reports of the great horse auction from day to day. She had never seen her father so animated. The habitual droop of his shoulders had straightened for the first time in her memory of him, and he had evidently taken pains with his toilet. His tie was straight, his shirt clean, and his unruly hair smoothly suggestive of a scented oil. The change in Bill was startling in the extreme and, to Meggy's fond eyes, pleasing.

Through all one hot day he worked more steadily than he had ever done in his life before, putting up on trees, stables, and store windows the flaming posters that proclaimed the coming horse sale. Dinner with O. P. at the Zimmerman House and the latter's richly worded praise had been ample reward to Bill for his efforts. Horse dealers from the surrounding counties were gathering to the county seat now from day to day to fall under the spell of the eloquent stranger and the colorful stories of his large ranch in Nebraska. The carload of blooded horses was drawing nearer each day, though Berger admitted the trip was taking a little longer than he had anticipated.

There came a morning when he met Bill with an anxious expression on his handsome face. He was hesitant to mention it; but as man to man the situation, briefly, was that he was running short of funds. A draft he had been expecting had not yet arrived. It would doubtless come in a few days, but meanwhile . . .

"I feel," O. P. ended with an impressive lowering of the voice, "that I can safely discuss this embarrassing situation with you and seek your advice. I might add that I am not a person who makes a confidant of every man. You, Bill, have impressed me from the first as both sagacious and sympathetic."

Bill's chest rose by several inches. "You leave this here to me, O. P.," he assured him promptly. "Look what you're doin' for all the horse dealers in this district. It'd be a durned funny thing if they couldn't help you out in a little matter like this. How—how much do you need?"

O. P. looked even more pained.

"The unfortunate thing is that I have counted so absolutely upon the draft's prompt arrival that I have run myself dangerously low. I need approximately seventy-five dollars—only for a few days, you understand. I shall reimburse you at the earliest possible moment."

"Sure," Bill said. "You just leave this matter to me!"

Bill went at once to Meggy and found her making preserves

in the kitchen, singing as she worked. He laid the case before her.

"If you could jist let me have—say fifteen dollars to start the thing off, I could say to the other fellows I was startin' the ball rollin' an' they'd all chip in. There's eight of us dealers waitin' round here just now, an' they're every one as het up about the horses as I am. Could you let me have it, Meggy? Mind, I'll give it back to you in a few days."

Meggy was worried. Bill's requests previous to this had been for two or three dollars, and occasionally for five. Now the amount asked for made her pause. She had it in the bureau drawer in her room—that and more. In matters of household money Alex was always provident and generous. He had a hatred of bills and insisted upon Meggy's paying cash for everything. The first of each month he put a certain amount in this drawer for her use. He had not decreased this even in these months when she knew he felt that every penny counted in the ultimate success of his project; but he did expect it, naturally, to cover all her needs for a considerable time.

Meggy hesitated, distressed.

"If you could just let me have it, Meggy, O. P.'s as good as gold. If you could only meet him you'd know he's a big man, used to plenty of money. This is just a little matter of obligin' him till this here draft comes."

"But, Father, I'm not sure how Alex would feel about it."

"Why, it's jist for a few days, Meggy! It ain't as if I was askin' you to give it to me."

"I know, Father, but I really couldn't. Not that much."

The eager confidence went out of Bill's face. As it did, Meggy saw in a flash what Bill himself did not realize. Never before in all his life had he been important; never had *his* advice been sought; his help asked for. Now for the first time he was a man of affairs, dealing in large business, lifted into prominence by his close association with the magnificent "O. P." All this would be dashed if he failed to get the money.

"It—it means an awful lot to me," he said slowly, "but if you can't, you can't. That's all there is to it."

Something in Meggy's heart broke in tenderness. Sudden pictures rose to her mind: her father smuggling a doll home to her when Granny said she was too old to play with them; his building her a playhouse behind the barn, swinging her with tireless patience on the high swing under the apple tree, pulling striped "pokes" of candy from his pockets after each trip to town, fanning her for hours on end once when she had a fever.

"Wait, Father," she said breathlessly. "Let me see how much I have. Maybe—after all—"

She ran upstairs. At the drawer she paused, anxious and uncertain. She knew Alex would not want her to do this, and yet her father was pathetic in his pleasure over this whole business of the Western horses. Oh, it was hard when an old devotion ran athwart a new!

She counted out the bills, hurried downstairs, and gave them into Bill's hand. He was all smiles and assurance now.

"That's the girl, Meggy! I certainly am obliged to you. Now you see I can get the other fellahs to loosen up if I set the pace. I'll be goin' along now, for this whole thing's pretty much on my shoulders. But you'll get this back soon, don't you worry!"

Bill went back to the barn which O. P. had rented against the arrival of the horses. This had become the clubhouse for the dealers. Bill entered now, largely, told his story, and laid down his fifteen dollars with a flourish.

There was some discussion pro and con, but the spell of the stranger was upon them all. Besides, every one of them had worked with ordinary horses for a lifetime. Their mouths watered now at the thought of a carload of blooded animals fresh from Western plains! Their hands twitched to smooth them down, to feel their backs, their flanks, their fetlocks!

The seventy-five dollars was raised and presented to O. P. Berger when he entered a little later. His manner of receiving it was that of a great man embarrassed but still, bowing gra-

ciously to necessity, willing to accept the aid of his friends. Not a man present watching his courtly dignity but felt that a mortgage on the home farm would be small enough service to render the gallant stranger if it were needed.

As a matter of fact O. P. had news. A telegram from his son stated that he and the horses were now as far as Ohio. Delays had been caused by heavy traffic but he hoped soon to arrive in Greensburg.

Excitement now ran high. The next day was spent chiefly in listening to Berger as he discussed the merits of the horses, and planning the auction. Other men besides dealers dropped in at the Zimmerman House or at the stable to listen to tales of the Nebraska ranch and go away filled with admiration for O. P. McKelvey himself told Meggy that in all his days he had never met a more charming and gifted conversationalist. Meggy kept silent about the delayed draft, but felt somehow easier in her mind.

But the next word from the son caused Berger's handsome brow to knit tragically. He read the telegram to the group.

Have reached Pittsburgh but Railroad Company here charge \$100 excess. Cannot leave till paid. Wire instructions.

"Pittsburgh!" Bill shouted. "Gosh, they're almost here! Only thirty miles off, fellahs. What's a hundred dollars? Can't we raise the wind that much?"

"Gentlemen," Berger said painfully, "I have never before in my whole business career met with such embarrassing and unforeseen circumstances or with such wholehearted cooperation and kindness!"

"There's more dealers comin' to town every day interested in these here horses. You just give us a coupla hours, O. P., an' we'll have the money."

There was general approval as the group scattered to see what could be done.

This time when Bill came to Meggy his confidence and ex-

hilaration swept all before it. Remembering McKelvey's complimentary remark in regard to Berger she went again to the drawer and took out the last bill. Ten dollars. It was what Bill demanded. She shuddered a little at her temerity and the fact that she now held more than one secret from Alex. But Bill's enthusiasm was beautiful to see. He had literally become transformed. He thanked her now, told her he would be back to stay the night though not to wait supper for him as he would probably be eating at the hotel with O. P., and was gone, not with his accustomed saunter, but briskly, head up, arms swinging jauntily at his sides.

When he reached the stable an attitude of high jubilation prevailed. The money was being raised rapidly. Several business men of the city had been approached and in the interest of trade had contributed to the fund.

By afternoon Berger had received it touchingly and gone off to communicate with his son. When he returned he was visibly excited. A reply wire from his son stated that he and the horses would reach Greensburg at ten o'clock the following evening.

By the next day the group of dealers numbered fifteen. Led by Bill, they spent all afternoon putting the last touches to the stable where the horses were to be housed. The load of shavings was distributed over the floor of the stalls, the mangers filled with hay, and the remaining space swept clean. Bill worked indefatigably at mending all loose boards and pasting paper over broken windowpanes. Though the group scattered at the supper hour they returned in the early dusk to the stable, where they sat around in a high state of tension waiting till the hour for meeting the train. Berger himself, his handsome face showing in the dim lantern light, had never been so jovial, so entertaining. His fund of stories was limitless, his descriptions fascinating.

"What time ought we to be gettin' up to the station?" Bill inquired once.

"Oh, I should say about nine-thirty," O. P. answered. "But

excuse me just a minute now. This occasion certainly calls for the best smokes in town and I'm going to get them! We can light up when we start later for the station, eh, gentlemen?"

"I'll go along with you, O. P." Bill volunteered.

Berger waved him off with a graceful but definite gesture.

"No, I wish to do this errand alone. Knowing your generosity, I might at the last be cheated out of my little treat. The best smokes in town are none too good, and I'm paying for them. Be back in a few minutes, gentlemen! Cigars maduro!"

When he was gone Bill appealed to the crowd.

"Did you ever know a finer fellah in all your born days? Seems to be like I've knowed him for a lifetime, an' it's just a little over a week!"

"He sure can talk!"

"An' what he don't know about horses ain't worth knowin'. I've picked up a lot of points."

"Gosh, I'd like to see that ranch of his. Never been West myself."

"Be some fun gettin' the horses unloaded. Bet you they'll be frisky all right."

"Wonder what they'll go for at auction?"

Comment rose, comment waned, and finally died away.

"He must have gone clear to Virginny for them cigars," one man spoke at last.

"That's just him!" Bill replied with an air of superior knowledge. "I'll bet he's been to every store in town huntin' the best ones. He's a gentleman, fellahs, an' no mistake!"

At the end of an hour, the men were decidedly edgy, and even Bill was nervous.

"My gosh, I hope nothin's gone wrong again. If he's got word of any more hold-ups he'd just hate to tell us!"

"Well, it's nine o'clock now. What are we goin' to do?"

A sickly color had fallen upon Bill's face. His heart felt curiously heavy.

"I bet you he's at the station waitin' for us. Mebbe it got

so late on him he just went on there to wait for us." He tried hard to resume his confident tone.

"Well, come on. We might as well be goin' up there an' find out."

The dealers started hurriedly for the station, Bill putting out the lanterns before they left. The stable had the good smell of leather and bygone horses and fresh hay. Bill had a sudden pang at leaving it, a sinking premonition. He had never been so happy as this last week. The companionship of O. P., the preparation of the big barn, the anticipation of the coming of the horses . . .

He hurried along with the rest on the long walk to the station. It was nine-thirty when they reached it. There was no stir there. The platform was empty and there was no sign of Berger. The waiting room was empty too, they could see, with Joe Moore, the ticket agent, sitting comfortably behind the window with a green shade over his eyes. The shoes of the fifteen dealers sounded like artillery on the boards of the waiting-room floor. Joe Moore got up suddenly at the sound and peered through the grating of the window.

"Go ahead. Ask him, Bill, if he seen anything of Berger."

Bill hesitated, but they were all waiting for him, the leader, to speak.

"Hello, Joe," he managed, making a powerful effort to be casual.

"What's this, a convention or something?" Joe queried.

"Why, no, we was just expectin' to meet a friend here 'bout this time. O. P. Berger, him that's been at the Zimmerman House for a week. Seen anything of him?"

Joe spat toward the corner.

"Sure, I seen him at nine o'clock. He come up here to the windah an' bought a ticket."

There was a rumble of wrathful surprise from the dealers. Above it Bill's voice rose tragically.

"A ticket! Where to?"

"New York. He took the 9:05 east. What'd he do? Skunk out on you?"

"This ain't possible," Bill shouted. "His son's gettin' in here at ten o'clock tonight with a carload of Western horses. That's what we're here for: to help unload them!"

Joe Moore's smile was omniscient and final.

"There ain't no load of horses due here tonight. I could 'a' told you that. We'd have had the waybill if there was. Why, that fellow's been lyin' to you."

Before the words were out of his mouth young Nelson of the Zimmerman House entered the room breathless as though from running.

"Say," he panted, "has that fellah Berger skipped town? Seen anything of him, Joe?"

"Took the 9:05 east."

"The damned swindler! I knew it when one of the maids reported his clothes were gone. The rat! Livin' on us for ten days an' never a cent for it. And entertaining, too, like a lord! Bill Parkinson here was gettin' most of his meals there, as thick as thieves with him. Looked almost like you was in cahoots with him, Bill."

Bill took a step forward, but the others intervened.

Young Nelson cooled down momentarily.

"Course I know that ain't so, Bill, but I hope you'll be man enough to pay your share of it anyway. Well, the next time we're caught with an oily-tongued liar like that, I'll eat his horses an' spit out their tails—so I will, by God!"

The air was suddenly heavy with profanity. The men had not traded horses all their lives without acquiring a vocabulary. They used it all that night, with young Nelson joining bitterly in, and Joe Moore peering with delighted interest through his window. Only Bill was silent, white-faced and speechless.

The other men were all more or less prosperous. They had no money to lose, but at least what they had lost was their own. Bill had lost Meggy's. They all shared the disappointment

involved. With almost childish eagerness they had anticipated the coming of the blooded horses.

But over and above all this, Bill was bereft. He moved toward the door, speaking for the first time.

"I don't feel so good," he said. "I gotta get home. But I still can't understand this. O. P. Berger was the nicest man I've ever known."

He could hear their voices pursuing him, but he did not care. He stumbled along toward the street where Meggy lived, vaguely recalling with relief that he had waited to put out all the lanterns at the barn. He could see clearly in his mind's eye the rows of waiting stalls carpeted with shavings and the mangers filled with fresh hay. That, too, was no doubt unpaid for, and the shavings and the posters. Berger had gone with a hundred and seventy-five dollars clear in his pockets for ten days' work of blandishments and oratory.

Bill's shoulders sagged again now, more than ever, and his feet dragged as he walked.

"So that was it," he muttered heavily to himself. "It wasn't that he liked me or thought I was smart an' good for something. It was because I'm a sucker. Just a sucker."

He turned in at Meggy's gate. There was a light burning in the parlor where Alex would be working. He would go to the kitchen door and explain quietly to Meggy as much as he could and then go on up to bed without speaking to Alex. That is, if his legs would climb the stairs. They felt very queer and shaky.

Meggy met him brightly in the kitchen.

"Have the horses come?" she asked.

Bill sank down in the nearest chair, and shook his head. He could not speak. Meggy came closer.

"What's the matter, Father? Are you sick? Is anything wrong?" Her tone was full of fear.

"Everything's wrong, Meggy. I can't believe it yet, but—but O. P. was a swindler. The whole thing was a trick. We just

found out tonight. He went off on the 9:05 train east, an' there ain't no carload of horses nor nothin'." He put his head into his hands, which she could see were trembling.

"But the money?" Meggy cried aloud in her fright and distress. "Will we lose the money?"

"What money?" It was Alex's voice from the doorway. He stood there looking from Meggy to her father. Bill did not raise his head. Meggy's face as she turned to her husband was piteous.

"Why, you see, Alex, they had to raise some money for this man, this Mr. Berger, and Father asked me—and I had the house money—it was only lending it, for the man was to pay them all back soon and I—"

"How much did you give him?"

Meggy swallowed hard. Her cheeks were scarlet, and the tears near.

"Twenty-five dollars," she faltered.

Alex gazed at her as though he could not believe her statement; then his voice cut into the silence like a bullet.

"Mr. Parkinson, I want to know this whole thing from the start to the finish. Sit up there, an' tell me yourself."

As if with great difficulty Bill drew himself up; but he would not meet Alex's eyes. Slowly, with many hitches and breaks, he told the whole story of the machinations of O. P. Berger. What he could not tell was the joy he had known in that short week or the misery that lay upon him now.

As he proceeded with his story, Alex's face flushed and went pale. Meggy watching him knew that the anger which she had seen but twice before was upon him now. She tried to speak, but Alex's voice drowned hers.

"So he was a swindler, was he? An' what better are you yourself? Comin' here beggin' money from your daughter. Takin' twenty-five dollars an' throwin' it away on this lyin' cheat when I'm workin' myself to the bone almost to get on in my business an' needin' every cent I can scrape together. You took the very bread out of our mouths, that's what you did. You that never

did an honest day's work in your life! You that's too lazy to earn your own money, have to come here an' fair steal it from me! If there's any shame in you, you ought to feel it now, you—"

Bill had risen. He had stood all he could stand that night. His eyes were bloodshot, and his lips quivered. He shook a trembling fist of fury in Alex's face and fought back with the only weapon at his hand.

"All right, mebbe I am lazy an' no good! But I'll tell you this much. You that's so smart an' can make so much money! My wife never was afraid to tell me she was in a family way. She never had to come cryin' to her mother behind my back that I didn't pay no attention to my child! Mebbe I ain't good at makin' a living, but may God damn me in hell if I haven't been good to my wife; an' I'm throwin' that in your teeth, so I am. Ain't that so, Meggy?"

But Meggy was past speech. She had sunk down weakly on a chair, where she struggled to keep sick waves from overcoming her. At sight of her white face, Bill's cup of bitterness overflowed. All fury seemed to go out of him. His eyes were suddenly father's eyes.

"Now I've done it," he muttered slowly. "Makin' more trouble for you, Meggy, girl."

He half turned toward Alex. "Don't mind what I was sayin'. I was just kinda upset. I'll be goin' on home now."

"Not this late," Meggy said weakly. "Not this late, Father."

"Yes," Bill repeated, fumbling at the door knob. "I'll be goin' on home."

He left the kitchen in a white silence, more terrible by far than the sound of the angry voices. Alex and Meggy did not move or speak until the sound of his buggy wheels had died away; then Alex's voice came with a sharpness Meggy had never heard before.

"Look at me!" he said.

Meggy sat on the side of the kitchen chair, her arms upon the

back and her head buried in them. She only moved her head feebly.

"Look at me, Meggy," he repeated sternly.

She sat up then, but the firm, familiar room seemed unstable. Strange waves of light and heat moved up and down before her eyes, and then she saw nothing but darkness.

When she opened her eyes she was lying on her bed with blankets tucked about her. She lay for several minutes trying to remember how she came to be there. Then she saw that Alex was bending over her, his face bleak with anxiety, a glass in his hand.

"Are you all right now?"

"I think so. Did I faint clear away?"

"Aye. I mebbe frightened you. Oh, dearie, I never meant to!"

She reached shakily for the glass and drank of it. "It wasn't just that. It was everything. And I'm not very strong—just now."

"It's true then, what your father said."

"Yes."

"When—when did it happen?"

"In June."

"June!" Alex drew a long breath. He remembered those quiet weeks with the perfumed summer darkness.

"But why did you keep it from me all this time, Meggy?"

She raised herself a little on the pillows.

"I never meant to. But you've been so busy and so taken up with the mine. I was afraid you'd feel it was just something more to bother you, and I couldn't bear to have you feel like that."

He sat on the edge of the bed, his face drawn and grave.

"And the other? The rest of what he said? I've got to get to the bottom of this, Meggy."

The tears welled up in her eyes. "I know I shouldn't have

given him the money; but he was so sure and so pleased about it all, I just couldn't refuse him. I'm so sorry, Alex. I'll do without clothes or anything to make it up."

Alex shook his head. "I'm not talkin' about the money. It was a bad business; but if we can live with it, we can live without it, I suppose. I'm talking about the other—what you told your mother . . . Aye, that cuts me, Meggy, that you'd be talkin' about me to them."

A small white flame seemed to leap in Meggy's eyes, and dry up her tears. She drew back a little, and Alex felt her withdrawal.

"I can't honestly say I'm sorry about that though I never meant to tell them. It just slipped out when I was with Mother and Granny one day. Father must have been at the door and heard. But they comforted me. Granny said lots of men don't make much over their children. You see . . . Oh, Alex, I wish you loved Ranald more."

"What are you sayin'? Would I not be lovin' my own child?"

"Yes, I know you love him, in a way; but you never show it. And even if he's just a little thing he senses it. He doesn't run to meet you like he does Father or Uncle Andy or Pat. They always act so fond of him and talk to him and bring him little presents, and make over him."

"But, Meggy, you've got to look at it reasonable. Just now I've so much on my mind I can't be dafferin' wi' bairns, even my own."

"I know," Meggy said quietly. Then she sighed as though from great weariness, closed her eyes and said nothing more. Alex sat watching her until he could bear it no longer. He swept her up into his arms, cradling her there.

"Be patient with me, Meggy. I'm the way I'm made, an' I canna be any other. An' besides I'm in heavy waters just now. Sometimes more than you realize, I doubt."

And once more, slowly, as she felt his nearness, and the power

of it, the burden of the night fell from her and the pain for her father in her heart. For this little time at least she forgot everything else: the child asleep in the room beyond, the child unborn within her womb. They were alone, she and Alex, on a vast shore with the surge of their love beating upon them.

At last she raised her head to look into his eyes. "It's you must be patient with me, Alex. And don't ever give a thought again to what I said."

The stress of that night, however, left its mark upon Meggy. When the doctor was consulted he urged caution and much rest, and Alex decided there must be a servant. Meggy demurred, but Alex had his way. So a strong, middle-aged woman named Susan was secured—a woman whom Meggy had always known on the farm. She brought an abundance of cheerfulness along with her strong arms, and Meggy, relaxing, knew that her coming was wise.

As the months passed the affairs of the Magnus mine were still in a critical state. Because of drainage troubles a new long entry had to be driven. When work was actually begun the men hired, mostly foreigners who had drifted over from Connells-ville upon word of the new mine, proved to be undesirable; and most of them had to be replaced by others. The Scotia continued its steady, prosperous way, however, and this was Alex's support when things looked black for the fate of the Magnus.

One day after the turn of the year Alex had a caller. Debonair as usual although picking his way through mud and black dust up to the office, Jack White came upon him one afternoon in late February. At sight of him Alex flushed painfully. The bitter humiliation of the Rockwell reception had never left him. And here, facing him now, was a man who had been a witness to it. But Jack's salutation was as free of all constraint as ever.

"Hello, MacTay! What kind of a mudhole have you got here, anyhow?"

"How are you, White? Keep over to the right there. It's better walkin'."

"Well, well," Jack said cheerfully as he shook hands. "So you're still a slave to ambition, I see. How's this new project going?"

Alex relaxed. It was impossible not to do so in Jack's friendly presence.

"Well," he replied cautiously, "it could be worse, I doubt." Jack threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"That's right, MacTay. Never let yourself go! But translating that speech from hard Scotch into easy American I take it to mean you've had some reverses but still hope to come out on top, eh?"

"That's about right, I guess."

"I thought so. Well, I'd put my money on you any time, MacTay. By the way, I hear you walked off with one of Rockwell's best contracts. Darned smart of you, I'd say."

"How did you hear that?"

"Oh, Dad knows Blair of Pittsburgh Iron & Steel. I guess old Rockwell's running a little slow now. He's slipped up on contracts once too often."

Alex's eyes had a sharp light in them.

"You're sure of that?"

"Oh, I get some inside reports occasionally. Matter of fact I came to mention something of the sort to you today. Only swear by your holy native heather, my boy, that you'll keep it under your cap."

"You know I will, an' thanks to you for takin' the trouble."

Jack caught a glimpse of someone at the office door and at once relapsed into his light tone.

"Oh, I'm spending the week end with some folks in Greensburg and just thought I'd drop around for a chat. Nice little works you have here."

When Alex had dismissed his other caller, Jack lowered his voice.

"This," he said, "is not actually a tip. It's rather in the nature

of a tip preparatory to a tip. The point is that there's a lot of unrest in the anthracite fields back east."

Alex's eyes narrowed, considering.

"Things are going to bust there some day. Maybe in six months. Maybe not for a year. But the yeast's in the dough. Get the idea?"

"A strike?"

"Some day. Just thought it might cheer you up to know it's coming. And listen, MacTay. If I'm round at the time I'll tip you off some more. But here's the main thing I want to tell you. When it does come off, you keep in with the Railroad, and don't squeal at the terms. I know what I'm talking about. But for heaven's sake don't let anybody else know that I do!"

Alex did not speak for several seconds. Then he said: "I'm certainly obliged to you, White, an' I think I see what you're gettin' at. But why are you tellin' me this?"

Jack laughed his careless laugh.

"Oh, I don't know. I guess because a man that can't walk in a straight line himself rather admires one who can. I've always felt from the first that if I could get you to have one 'wee nippie' with me—that's what you call it, isn't it?—we might be friends."

Alex smiled. "I feel that way now without the wee nippie."

"Good," said Jack. "I'm glad to know that before I'm off to the wars!"

"You think it's goin' to be war?"

"Sure. If those old hens in Congress ever get done sitting on their eggs. They should have declared war the minute the Maine was blown up. Well, if they ever come to the point I'm off! It'll be a bit of an adventure in furrin parts, and, besides, it's the unattached wastrels like me who ought to do the fighting. By the way, how's Mrs. MacTay?"

"Very well—that is, pretty fair," Alex answered. "We're expectin' a new bairn come March."

Jack rose to go.

"The best wishes in the world to you both. If I could find a girl with a face like hers I'd settle down tomorrow!"

Alex walked with him to the main road, where he had left his buggy, and they parted with a strong handshake. On the way back to his office Alex still felt the warmth of Jack's gay friendliness.

"Aye, he's a couthy chap an' all, when you get used to his ways," he said to himself.

And then his mind turned intently to the possibilities which Jack's premonitory tip had opened up to him.

"If there's ever an anthracite strike," he thought, "it would put me where I want to be. But I'll keep a quiet cheep the now. I'll not even tell McKelvey. If it comes off some day it'll be on the Magnus I'll be makin' the big money, for it's my own. Aye, it's been hard pullin'; but if I can hold out I'll see the top of the hill yet."

Toward the end of March on a cold gusty morning when the rain played swish on the windows and the sky was darkly gray, Meggy's second child was born. It was a girl. A fragile bit of life that kept them waiting for its first weak cry.

When Alex came in to see the baby, he peered at it, and something unexpected caught at his heartstrings. A tiny woman child. When he had first looked upon his son he had felt strong and proud. Now the emotion was different. He felt a mist in his eyes and a tenderness that melted his strength like pain.

"She's bonny," he whispered to Meggy. "She's goin' to be the very image of you."

The child was named Tirzah Margaret for the two grandmothers, and was called Tirzah, although Alex reserved the right to say "little Meggy" whenever he wished. From the beginning Meggy noticed with an unspeakable joy that Alex was fond of the baby. She was so delicate, so flowerlike, so appealing! He would bend over her, smiling, while she caught at his finger. He would sing to her, a thing he had never done with Ranauld, and often repeat old rhymes:

"Rain, rain, rattle stanes
Dinna rain on me!
But rain on Johnnie Groat's house
Far owre the sea."

It was not all due to the fact that, since that bitter night when Bill had fought against Alex with the only weapon at his hand, Alex had made an effort to pay more attention to Ranald, and was now for the same reason forcing himself to show affection for the new baby. No, his behavior toward little Tirzah was altogether spontaneous. He went at once to see her when he came in from work; he got up quickly in the nighttime if she cried; he talked of her at the table.

"She's goin' to be the image of you, Meggy! Her hair's gold even now, mind!"

"I wish she'd gain a little more. She's so tiny."

"Ah, that makes her all the bonnier. You don't want a big, strappin' girl."

As the months went by, however, Alex, too, sometimes studied the child a bit anxiously. She was not a strong baby. Her skin was delicate and waxlike; and while she could not be said to be ill she did not have quite the normal look of health. She would gain it later, though.

And she was beautiful! When on an occasional Saturday afternoon they walked forth with their small family, Alex beamed upon those who stopped to admire the child. She was a friendly little thing, and her smile, her golden curls, her eyes like blue cornflowers captivated all who looked upon her.

Meggy's cup of joy seemed full. Small Ranald was flourishing, busy with his own childish affairs, sturdy, determined, even-tempered. And now in her arms at last she held the new key to Alex's heart.

Bill began to drop into the kitchen again as he had done before the quarrel. Little Tirzah was his darling, and he noted every change in her from week to week to report to the women

at home. He always left before Alex came, however, and drove back without going up to Main Street. He had aged that winter, and though he would admit it to no one he did not feel as young as he once did. He missed sadly the old pleasures of his Greensburg trips. Just now especially, while the war was on, he longed to settle down with his cronies or even with strangers and discuss the stirring events of Manila Bay and San Juan Hill. But he was no longer welcome to drop into the Zimmerman House for an hour's lounge in the comfortable lobby, for the bill run up there by O. P. Berger was still unpaid in its entirety. He could not loaf at the livery stable either, for there was always someone there to turn the knife ingeniously in the old wound from which Bill had never recovered. So when he came to town now he came with no elastic "errands" to do. These he attended to on other days in New Salem where, even though the people had heard the Berger story, there was little said about it.

The new baby brought him something to take up his mind; besides, he saw that Meggy was happy and contented and with great relief assumed that neither the loss of the money nor the words he had blurted out had made permanent trouble for her with Alex.

In a sense there was rest on every side just then, for the Magnus mine was at last operating. There had been so many apparently insurmountable difficulties along the way that by contrast and outwardly it seemed as though the new works were now on a safe footing. Even to Alex there was a certain sense of relief in the present condition. What he knew that no one else (except Colonel Selden) did know, however, was this: the fate of the Magnus depended now upon absolutely clear sailing. He had stretched his credit as far as it would go. One major setback now would wipe him out. This he knew, but he kept his own counsel. McKelvey congratulated him, Pat was jubilant, and Gilly eyed him with new respect.

"Man, I never thought you'd make it there awhile back.

You've got a long head on you, Alex, an' enough gumption for six men. Well, the wind's with you now, I guess."

To all of these Alex smiled noncommittally; but alone in his office he clenched his hands, set his teeth and steeled himself to endure the suspense of the next months.

"If I can get a year's steady production I'm safe. An' after all I've been through there's comfort in at least knowin' that. Besides, there's nothin' else I can think of that could happen to us now that we haven't had," he often reminded himself.

Sometimes before he could banish the thought it came over him that the world was not so safe for him with his mother out of it. With that delicate perception which they had shared he knew that as long as she had lived he had been the center of her thoughts and her prayers. With all the intensity of her strong spiritual nature she would be besieging heaven's gate for her son during those first six years he had been in America. Had some power gone out of him now because that craving heart had ceased to beat?

He fought hard against this recurring thought as he fought against all remembrance of her, since it brought him pain and weakened him with regrets. No, he assured himself, he was as he had always been, and the victory over the Magnus mine would still be his.

It was when the baby was a year and a half old that Ranald developed whooping cough. Nobody took the matter very seriously. Meggy had been nurtured upon the idea that all the so-called children's diseases were inevitable, and the earlier in life they came the better. As to trying to keep the baby from contagion, that was not even thought of. Indeed old Mrs. MacIntosh promptly sent word that if the baby took it now it would likely be the makin' of her.

"I've seen many a donsie bairn cured with a good spell of whooping cough," she reiterated at home, and Bill faithfully delivered the message.

In spite of these favorable opinions it seemed at first that

the baby was to escape. Then one day, between morning and evening, she had it.

"They never get it bad though, littlin's, do they?" Alex inquired.

"No, they always have a light turn, I think. If she was just a stronger child I wouldn't worry at all."

"Aw, she'll be fine. Just keep her well happed up that she don't get more cold on it."

Back in the farm kitchen Tirzah and Mrs. MacIntosh leafed again through the big "doctor book," looking for cures under the head "For Very Young Children." These they copied carefully and dispatched with Bill. Meggy used them faithfully: spoonfuls of the liquid from boiled flaxseed; a small pinch of cream of tartar in milk to sweeten the stomach; a chest poultice of slippery elm and camphor. Ranald's case was running a perfectly normal course, and there was no thought of having the doctor. Not for whooping cough.

Little Tirzah was by now most engaging. Still delicately beautiful, she fluttered uncertainly from chair to chair and made attempts at speech between her baby cries and laughter. If as Meggy feared, that dreadful night of the quarrel had "marked" her with physical frailty, it had not affected her disposition. She was sunny and gay from her cradle. She accepted now the new experience of the whooping cough with general equanimity, watching her sturdy brother in the throes of it, and evidently deciding this was but another phase of a constantly surprising new world.

It was not until Ranald was well over it that Meggy became conscious of the fact that Tirzah's disease seemed at a curious standstill. It had never at its worst been severe, but it grew no better. All the women told her not to worry. A fall case of whooping cough often held on a long time, they said. The child was not really sick; just "donsie." After the turn of the year she would pick up, and by spring you wouldn't know her! Even the doctor was reassuring when she finally called him in. Little

Tirzah established herself confidently upon his knee when he came, looked at his watch, patted his cheek, smiled, and went over her repertoire of words.

The old doctor was charmed.

"Nothing to worry about," he said. "She's delicately built, that's all; and whooping cough wears a child down. Lots of good milk and a little Scott's Emulsion to build her up . . ."

But Meggy's heart was still not satisfied. She tried to shake off the feeling, but it remained with her. Tirzah did not cough often, but when she did she lay very quiet after it, too tired apparently for play.

"If only the spring was here!" Meggy said daily, watching the dull skies.

There came back to her now with increasing frequency the words of Gilly's wife when Ranald was first affected.

"The air of the mine's the best thing for whoopin' cough," she said. "My Robert had it bad when we lived at Rockwell. I thought he'd near die with it. And I got Gilly to take him in the mine, and from that day on he never looked behind him! There's something in the mine air does it."

Meggy had repeated this to Alex, who said it was nonsense.

"The mine's no place for a bairn. Gilly's wife's just a gabby body. Na, na, we'll have none of them notions."

But Pat had spoken of it too, and Kathleen. They too had heard of this as a cure.

When whooping cough attacks the child,
The coal-mine air will make it mild.

They quoted this old miners' rhyme to Meggy, and Pat had even winked wickedly at her.

"If your old man won't see reason, Meggy, we'll turn another pin in his nose. Just say the word, an' I'll take Ranald in myself on the sly."

She had mentioned the matter timidly again, but Alex had been unyielding.

"It's just women's blether, Meggy. Now let's hear no more of it."

So Meggy had let the matter fall into forgetfulness, especially as Ranald had progressed so well. Now she remembered, as she watched Tirzah with anxious eyes and longed for spring. Suppose there really was something in it! Suppose draughts of the mine air would break up the cough as they all said they would. Suppose this was true, and she did nothing about it. Her life was continually being thwarted and coerced by the mines. Suppose now they held the greatest of all gifts for her and she ignored it?

Day after day these thoughts worked in Meggy's brain, as the winter wore away and Tirzah still coughed. To Meggy's eyes quickened by love the child seemed now a little less active than before, though Alex, when she questioned him, laughed at her fears.

In late February there fell a week of mild weather, a freakish week in which the sun had the warmth of spring. And as though Providence had planned it so, Alex and McKelvey were driving that Sunday over to Uniontown to see a man Alex hoped to secure as pit boss at the Magnus. They would be gone all day.

Meggy made up her mind quickly. She left Ranald with a neighbor, wrapped Tirzah up warmly and pushed her in her carriage up to the livery stable. There she stated briefly that she wanted someone to drive her out to the mine. The men looked somewhat surprised, but a horse and buggy was speedily forthcoming and a half-grown boy installed to drive her. Meggy's cheeks were flushed as she climbed into the buggy and took Tirzah on her knee, and her eyes held a determined light.

They drove through the mild air, which seemed to partake of the Sabbath quiet, the baby prattling with delight at the trip. She had directed the boy to take the road to the Magnus rather than the Scotia, for she felt there would be no one about there. One thing weighed upon her: that was the rooted superstition that a woman in a mine brought bad luck. She knew Alex took

no stock in it; but Gilly did, and the miners. So did Pat. She could hear Gilly now telling his stories.

"An' I've never known it to fail, mind ye. Here or in the old country. If a woman goes into a mine there'll be trouble inside of three days after. I've seen the miners lined up by the mine mouth refusin' to go to work of a mornin' because they got wind a woman had been in. Aye, it's bad business, I'm tellin' you!"

"You said the Magnus?" the boy suddenly questioned her.

"Yes," Meggy replied firmly though she was trembling. "The Magnus. Drive as near as you can to the mine. I'm going to take the baby in to see if it will help her cough. They say there's something in the air."

"That's what they say," the boy replied.

There was that striking silence around the new works which cessation from customary loud noise brings. The office was empty, and Meggy passed it hastily by, her heart all but failing her. Still she went on, carrying Tirzah whose weight was all too light. The dark opening in the earth's side loomed before her. With a hasty look right and left, she entered it.

She chatted cheerfully to the child, who clung more closely to her as the daylight gradually receded behind them. It was wet and muddy underfoot but Meggy was not even aware of it. She kept looking back often, watching the mine mouth. It was always there, so she walked slowly on, eager to leave the outside atmosphere entirely behind her. The dark walls seemed to come closer together as she went, and she could feel now herself the strange moist, musty carbon air of the mine. It was like nothing she had ever felt or smelled before. There might be curative properties within it. There must be.

She paused, telling the baby to take deep breaths, as she set the example.

"Nice air. Good air. Cure Tirzah's bad cough. Nice mine. Daddy's mine."

She had walked into the darkness now, but she kept going on

slowly, picking her way, so intent upon her errand that she stopped looking behind her. The farther she could get in, the better.

Meggy began to feel the tension lessen within herself. It had all been so easy after all. And how could anyone possibly blame her for taking this chance even if they knew? But no one would know. She would go out now in a few minutes and drive back home. She would say nothing to Alex today, nor for some time perhaps. Then she would describe it all to him, laughing; how she had stumbled along, her knees trembling, talking brightly, foolishly to the baby; how Tirzah had kept saying: "Dood mine! Daddy's air!"

She decided at last it was time to retrace her steps. With a great lift of the heart she could hear Tirzah's gentle, easy breathing in of the curiously pungent, fluid atmosphere.

She turned about, and started slowly back. She had no idea how long she had been there, for her varying emotions had swept away all sense of time. How good Tirzah had been! How utterly trusting in the strange darkness! This would soon be lifted, though, for any moment now the first long gray shadowy light from the mine mouth would be showing.

But instead of this, the darkness seemed to grow heavier. Meggy plodded on, sometimes stumbling against the walls. She was so certain of her course that for some time she felt no fear, only a growing discomfort. Suddenly her foot slipped and she all but fell against a pile of debris which she had not encountered as she came in. She knew then in one terrible second of realization that she was lost. Why indeed should there ever have been talk of entries and cut-throughs, of butts and faces and brattices if there was but one long straight passageway? At some point, without knowing it, she had turned into another entry. And now, in the darkness, her sense of direction utterly gone, what was she to do? For the first time, sensing her mother's fear, little Tirzah began to whimper. Meggy pulled herself sharply together. The child must feel no fright, whatever

happened. She forced herself to speak in a cheerfully casual tone, as she stopped to take note of her position. It was really dark except as her eyes, grown accustomed to the absence of light, could dimly discern the wet shiny walls of coal. But whether she should keep going forward or turn back in order to find her way again to the main entry, she did not know. She decided to turn once more, feeling her way in an attempt to locate the point where she had inadvertently followed the wrong path.

But after what seemed a long time she was still stumbling through the rough mud, and the darkness. Tirzah's small voice raised in half-intelligible questionings sounded strange and hollow as it echoed against the banking walls. A chill not from the coldness of the mine had penetrated Meggy's heart. She was at last desperately frightened at the whole situation.

"Listen," she said to the baby. Then throwing her voice as far as she could, she called, "Help! Help!" with a long drawn plaintive "Hoo—hoo" following.

There was a remote chance that the boy who had driven her might be at the mine mouth and hear. Even so, he could do nothing but give an alarm which would finally reveal her presence there. She was physically sick at the thought, but she dared not risk staying in the mine long enough for Tirzah to become cold. She realized, too, that if she did not emerge within a reasonable time the boy would probably go for help anyway. So with a feeling now of being utterly trapped she kept calling intermittently as she stumbled on.

Suddenly from far behind her she heard a man's answering voice.

"Hello! Who are you? What's the trouble?"

She was fairly caught now, but her first feeling was one of relief.

"It's Mrs. MacTay," she called. "I'm lost and can't find my way out."

There was a minute of strange silence. Then the voice said, "Keep callin' till I can locate you."

In an incredibly short time a flickering light appeared at the end of the passage. A man in mining clothes with his pit lamp on his cap came up to her. Meggy tried to smile.

"I came in farther than I meant, and I must have turned off without knowing it. If you'll just be kind enough to show me the way out—"

The man was staring at her incredulously.

"Does the boss know you're here?" he asked.

"No," Meggy said slowly. "He does not. I came because my baby has had whooping cough."

The man said nothing more; he only turned, signed to her to follow him and led the way back—only a short distance, it proved to be—by way of a cut-through to the long entry by which Meggy had come.

"I can go on now nicely from here," she said, "and thank you so much."

But the man did not turn.

"Were you working today?" she asked.

"Mending the pumps," he said laconically.

"And you're all finished?"

He did not answer.

They had reached the daylight now, and the baby laughed at the sunshine. Meggy spoke again.

"I'm so very much obliged to you. I'm all right now. My buggy is over there. Don't let me keep you any longer from your work."

He gave her an odd look with something like malevolence in it.

"I'm not goin' back in again now," he said. And started off toward the patch.

That afternoon and evening Tirzah did not cough once. Meggy, watching her in a feverish suspense, felt a thrill of vic-

tory. If the too frail little chest had rest now, all that happened that morning or would yet happen when she told Alex would be justified. She put the children early to bed, allowing one of the windows to remain wider open than usual because of the mild weather. Her heart beat fast as she sat down to await the return of the men. They would be ready, she knew, for the late supper she was keeping hot for them. What a strange Sabbath day it had been! She had gone to church very seldom since Tirzah was born, and Alex did not go at all. She had tried all her gentle persuasive arts upon him after they were first married, but had finally given up in despair. What he really felt about religion, she did not know.

"I'll leave the churchgoin' to you, Meggy," he would say. "I canna be bothered. I've got too much on my mind."

Old Mrs. MacIntosh blamed McKelvey.

"You know Andy's never been a perfessor, an' he's had a big influence on Alex. Aye, mind, but he has," she said once to Meggy and her mother.

Tirzah had looked thoughtful. "I doubt nobody can influence Alex very much," she said. "He's the kind of man that goes his own way."

But even though there was no regular attendance upon church Meggy saw to it that her Sundays were different from other days. She loved to sit as she was now, rocking slowly back and forth to the sound of the clock's ticking, her Bible on her knee, her thoughts divided between her reading and memories of old Sundays in the church at New Salem. These moments gradually brought her quietness of mind and relief from the round of tender anxieties that troubled her heart.

It was so tonight. When she heard the buggy drive in, she rose calmly with the feeling of fear all gone. There was still quiet from the room where the children lay asleep, and every other night for weeks now had been broken by the sound of Tirzah's coughing.

The men came into the kitchen in high spirits. Alex, of

course, in McKelvey's presence gave Meggy no caress, but his eyes continually sought hers, smiling. His trip had been successful; he had hired a new pit boss for the Magnus. He and McKelvey were deeply fond of each other, and a day alone together such as this put them both into fine form.

"This man of yours, Meggy," McKelvey said affectionately as they sat at the table, "always makes me think of the old darkey preacher that was baptizing a crowd of converts in a hole in the ice. One brother—Jones—disappeared down the hole after the immersion and didn't reappear. The preacher waited a minute and then said calmly, 'Brother Jones has evidently gone on to the Kingdom of God. Bring on the next!' That's Alex here all over. As soon as he gets out of one jam he yells, 'Bring on the next!'"

"Aye, but he can talk, this fellow," Alex parried when the laughter was over. "You should have heard him, Meggy, layin' off speeches to me as we rode along. Why don't you go round lecturin' for money, Mr. McKelvey?"

"Oh, you can't *sell* oratory, Alex. You have to give it away on the Fourth of July. Or to your friends. Well, what did you do all day, Meggy?"

Meggy looked up brightly. There seemed all at once no need of fear or concealment. Why not tell all her story now with Uncle Andy here to laugh over it?

"I had an adventure," she said, trying to keep her voice light. "You know I'm still so worried about Tirzah's cough hanging on so long, and they say the air of the mine cures whooping cough; so I just thought when today was so warm I'd take her out. So I got a rig and a boy to drive me and went out to the Magnus and took her in a little way—" Her voice sounded suddenly shrill in the deadness of the silence at the table. Alex was staring at her, his knife and fork still.

"And do you know she's never coughed since!" Meggy tried to end triumphantly, but the very air of the room was heavy now and tense.

McKelvey, seeing the look on the younger man's face, spoke hastily.

"Well now, that was an adventure. You're a plucky little woman to start off there yourself and go into the mine. Were you scared?"

Then Alex spoke.

"I've got to get this straight. You actually went in the mine?"

"Yes."

"How far?"

"Well, it was all dark at the last."

"Did anyone see you?"

"Well," Meggy said miserably, her heart ready to burst now from fear and from the tone of Alex's voice, "I did get sort of lost . . . I just turned off the main entry without knowing. So I had to call and a man came right away and took me out. He'd been mending the pumps, he said."

Alex pushed back his plate with his dinner half eaten, and rose from the table.

"Where are you going, Alex?"

"Out to the mine. I've got to get hold of Sexton as soon as possible. He's the one that saw you."

At the doorway he turned, anger and incredulity still struggling in his face for the mastery.

"I canna believe you'd do such a thing after me tellin' you plain it wasn't to be thought of. Goin' behind my back like this. You know what they say about a woman bein' in a mine. Well, now I'll have all that on my hands."

Before Meggy could reply McKelvey jumped up.

"I'll ride out along. And Meggy, you're not to worry a bit. As long as you and the baby are all right we'll take a chance on the rest, won't we, Alex? Miners have a lot of these fool superstitions that nobody pays any attention to. Utterly crazy, besides. . . . Where's my hat?"

He left them alone for a moment. Meggy touched Alex's arm.

"I don't wonder you're angry, but I had to do it. I couldn't

leave one chance untried about Tirzah. I feel so anxious sometimes. More than I tell you—" Her eyes were swimming with tears.

Alex bent his head quickly and kissed her. "You still oughtn't to have done it. I only hope to God nothing goes wrong at the mine. If it does, I'm sunk."

When he returned, it was midnight. He had found Sexton, an old-time miner, decidedly irritable and edgy. He had already spread the word of Meggy's visit, and at least a half-dozen of the men were determined not to enter the mine for three days. Alex had cajoled him into going back in that night with him and McKelvey until he had finished repairing the pumps. What the morrow would bring, he could not tell.

As Meggy woke again and again from her fitful sleep she was most conscious of one thing. There was no sound from the children's room. O blessed silence! If it continued, she knew in her heart that to her the affairs of the mine did not matter. She got up once to go in and bend over the children. Ranald slept as always, a ball of warm, rosy health. Little Tirzah lay with her curls a golden tangle upon the pillow, her breath coming and going easily, quietly. No rattle in the chest, no restless tossing and sudden waking from the cough.

Meggy went back and lay down softly again beside Alex. His ability by a mighty effort of will to shut out a present worry and fall immediately to sleep was incomprehensible to her. She drew close to him now and slipped her arm beneath his. She pitied him for all the problems that awaited him when he awoke.

"But I'm still glad I did it," she whispered to herself.

For two more days the sun shone warmly, the lilac buds filled out and patches of winter grass turned to green. "Pet" days, the old weather prophets called them, which brought storms in their wake. Meggy gave this no thought, for Tirzah's cheeks had a bit of color as she raised her face to the sun, and at night there was still the blessed unbroken silence. Alex, too, was somewhat

easier in mind as Monday passed and Tuesday, and, due to his unremitting efforts, the men were all back at work.

But dawn broke on Wednesday with a sharp wind blowing and a sleety rain beating upon the windows. The chill air penetrated the house, and as it did so a sound smote Meggy like a knife thrust. It was the cough again. Could it have been the warm days only that seemed to bring the cure?

All that day, as Meggy kept the fires well built up, she had a heavy feeling about her heart. She tried to shake it off, but it persisted. The afternoon wore on, the supper was prepared and waiting. Meggy kept watching the front windows for the sight of Alex coming down the street. She felt as though she must share with him as soon as possible this old fear that after the brief, bright respite had now returned.

But the supper hour came and passed, and there was no sign of Alex. He was often late, and so at last Meggy put the children to bed and sat down to wait for him. The chill wind still beat upon the windows, and from above came at intervals the sound of Tirzah coughing in her sleep.

About seven-thirty there was a noise of wheels and a step on the back porch. Meggy flew to open the door, but it was McKelvey, not Alex, who stood there.

"Uncle Andy! Is anything wrong?"

"There's been an accident, Meggy, out at the Magnus. Alex sent the word to me and said to tell you he mightn't get home tonight."

"He's not—"

"Oh, no, he's not hurt. I'm going on out and help if I can. It was some sort of cave-in, I gather."

Meggy's face was stone-white.

"Was—was anyone—"

McKelvey hesitated. She could see that his hands were unsteady.

"Now, Meggy, you're not to worry. Accidents happen in all mines. We've just been unusually lucky up till now."

"Tell me everything, Uncle Andy. I'll worry more if I think you're keeping something back."

"Well, I guess three men were caught. They've got them all out now."

"Alive?"

"Now, Meggy, I tell you you're not to think much about this thing. It's men's business—"

"Alive, Uncle Andy?"

"Two of them's alive. The doctor's gone on out."

Meggy caught his hands.

"Uncle Andy, what I did— Oh, it couldn't have made this happen, could it?"

McKelvey was almost violent. "Good heavens, no, Meggy! Your common sense ought to tell you that. And you're not to worry—"

"But the miners will all believe it. Even Pat believes it now since he's heard Gilly talking."

"Oh, Gilly be damned! It's all sheer nonsense. Now, Meggy, just forget that part of it. Are you afraid to stay alone tonight? Can you get a neighbor in to keep you company?"

"I'll be all right. I've stayed before. Oh, Uncle Andy, it's all so terrible. What will Alex say?"

McKelvey patted her shoulder.

"Now, now, just remember, Meggy, that this sort of thing happens at any works. It's bad, but you positively mustn't worry too much. Promise me."

"I'll try. Tell Alex—tell Alex—" McKelvey waited. "Never mind," she ended. "He'll be too busy."

When she was alone, Meggy walked slowly back and forth through the house for hours, twisting her hands as she walked. She did not hear the clock; she had no thought of rest or of time; she only knew there must be physical effort and weariness to dull the ghastly burden of the news she had received. At last, almost faint, she climbed the stairs and threw herself fully dressed upon the bed. Even then, wondering at her own wicked-

ness, she knew that the disturbed breathing from the adjoining room brought more pain to her heart than the thought of the dead man at the mine.

For a week Alex was home but a few hours each night. His eyes were heavy, and the strong bones of his face seemed to stand out through the flesh. The accident had been a bad one. A large "horseback," which the men had failed to discover, had caused a heavy cave-in in one of the out-entries. The dead man was a Slav lately come from Connellsville; the injured were two Irishmen who had been at the Magnus from the start. After all the burden of doing what he considered fair to the living and the dead, Alex still found the desperate problem facing him of keeping production up while one room was cleared of debris and a faint indefinable restlessness prevailed among the miners. He had to be everywhere, and he was.

During this first week he would not talk with Meggy about his troubles; but his looks and the long hours spoke for themselves. When at last, unable to bear the silence of it any longer, she sobbed out all her distress, he took her in his arms hungrily, his anger gone, and they comforted each other.

"We're over the worst now, I doubt," he said heavily. "It'll soon be behind us, if I can just keep things movin'."

By the very might of his will he held the men to their work, hiring new miners promptly to take the place of the injured. As the next week passed he saw grimly that production was slowly coming up again. The next week was slightly better. Still he knew that the sword hung over him by a thread; but still he set his teeth and refused to countenance the possibility of defeat.

Back at home Meggy gradually forgot the disaster in the growing fear for her child. Tirzah had at last refused to take the Scott's Emulsion and the tonics. They sickened her. For the first time Dr. Lewis, when he was called, looked grave.

"We've got to get her built up," he said. "When the warm weather comes she'll be fine, but we must get her built up a little now."

He decided leisurely upon new prescriptions and was cheerful again when he left.

And that very day Meggy had her encounter with Sally Rockwell. They always spoke as they passed each other on the street, Meggy shyly and with reserve, Sally with a somewhat self-conscious friendliness. Meggy frequently pondered Sally's attitude. Whether after that bitter night of the reception McKelvey himself, learning all, had gone to her in defense of his protégés; whether Jack White might have spoken his mind; or whether Sally and her husband had put two and two together after Alex and Meggy's sudden departure with no farewell to their hosts, Meggy did not know. She said nothing of all these surmises to Alex, whose brow darkened at the very name of Rockwell. But the fact remained that on their occasional meetings up and down Main Street, Sally always took pains to speak pleasantly.

On this afternoon, Meggy left the baby asleep, with the washwoman on guard, and taking Ranald went uptown to do her marketing and get the medicines at the drugstore. She had just started down Main Street when she met Sally, dressed as always in the height of fashion, strolling with little Cynthia, now four. There would have been as before only the brief interchange of how-do-you-do's if Cynthia had not been carrying an inflated balloon. It was an uncommon sight, and Ranald went at once to examine it. While they had eyed each other with interest before, the children had always been swiftly borne on by their respective mothers. Now with a shriek of delight Ranald pounced upon the stick to which the balloon was tied. Little Cynthia, to whom treasures were more common and less significant, allowed him to hold it while she explained in fluent baby dialect what would happen if he touched the balloon itself. They were at once so absorbed in their own small realities that Meggy's prohibitions and Sally's assurances were lost on the air.

They traded the balloon back and forth, seeing who could

hold it the higher, while Ranald laughed and shouted over the color.

"It's a blue one! It's a bright blue one! It's the color of the sky!"

The mothers at last stopped expostulating and watched the children together: the sturdy, handsome boy with his fair hair and firm chin; the dark-haired sprite of a girl with her vivid cheeks and bright eyes.

"We might as well let them play for a minute," Sally said at last. "They seem to get on well. How's your little girl?"

A shadow touched Meggy's face.

"I'm anxious about her," she said. "She had whooping cough when Ranald did last fall, and she still coughs. The doctor thinks she'll be all right when the warm weather comes, but—"

Meggy's eyes suddenly filled with tears in spite of herself. Sally turned toward her impulsively.

"Listen to me," she said. "Don't keep on fooling with the doctors here. I know what I'm talking about. Look at Cynthia! You'd never think she was a sickly baby, but she was. I took her up to Pittsburgh to Dr. Maclain. He's the best there is for children. His office is 250 Penn Avenue. And he just put her right on her feet. I've known dozens of children he's cured. Do try him!"

Meggy's clear blue eyes were melting with gratitude.

"Oh, thank you! It's wonderful to know about him. I've been so worried. Dr. Maclain, 250 Penn Avenue. I'll not forget, you may be sure! Come, Ranald, say good-bye to Cynthia."

"Good-bye, Cynthia. Good-bye, balloon!"

"Say good-bye to Ranald, Cynthia."

"Bye, Ranald."

They all moved on, Meggy's heart leaping in her breast. There was hope then! She would beg Alex to take her up to Pittsburgh at once—tomorrow, if he would. She would wrap Tirzah up so well! Put a little soft veil over her face if the weather was bad.

But they would go. At once. Oh, blessed, tangible hope! She did not get the medicines after all.

That night she told Alex after the children were asleep. She was so eager the words fell over each other in the telling. All the strength of her, all the vitality of both body and spirit, she poured into her story. She could not say to him that it was Sally Rockwell from whom the information came. "A woman I met up street," she designated her.

"And Alex," she ended breathlessly, "I want to take Tirzah to this doctor right away. I can't go myself with her—no through Pittsburgh in the train and streetcars and everything. Won't you take me, Alex, tomorrow?"

Alex looked at her in amazement.

"Tomorrow?" he echoed. "Why, Meggy, are you gone crazy? I can't leave the mine now even for a day. Besides, you've just got yourself all worked up over this thing. Somebody tells you there's a good doctor in Pittsburgh, and you want to be runnin' to him the very next day. That's silly. He's no better than our own belike. What would Dr. Lewis think of such a carryin'-on?"

"I don't care what he thinks. I've got to do something about Tirzah. She's losing, Alex. I can see it, every day. She doesn't play as much, and she won't eat."

"Aw, Meggy, you're just imaginin' this. You've got this idea in your head, an' you're fair fashed with it. The bairn's not sick. They often cough till summer. I've heard it many a time. What did Dr. Lewis say today? Tell me his very words."

"He said"—Meggy hesitated—"he said she had to be built up, and she'd be all right when the warm weather came."

"Aye," said Alex triumphantly. "What was I tellin' you? You're just bothered, Meggy, that's all."

"But he looked different this time when he saw her. I could tell it. Oh, Alex, if you love me, please take us up to Pittsburgh soon. In a day or so. Please, Alex!"

He looked at her, surprised by her intensity. She thought as she watched him that he had never seemed more implacable.

"I'm puttin' in twelve or thirteen hours a day at the mine," he said, "an' that's not even all I need. I can't take my eye off things for at least a month. You don't seem to realize, Meggy, that everything I have is hangin' in the balance till the Magnus begins to pay. I've got to make it pay, an' I've got to be there every day till it does. I'm not even takin' time off to go to Pittsburgh on business just now."

"She'd have to be carried all the way and well wrapped up. And then I'd be sure to get lost about streets. I need a man with me, Alex. There's Uncle Andy; but he's got this big case on now, and it's likely to be a long one—"

"Na, na," Alex said decidedly. "You mustn't be botherin' other folks with our affairs. You just stop fashin' yourself, like a good girl. By next month I'll take you if things are runnin' well again."

"It would only be for a day, Alex."

"A day's long enough to turn the tide one way or the other."

"Yes," Meggy said with a catch in her breath, "so it is."

"I'll take you up next month if she's still coughin'."

"But not now, Alex? Couldn't you?"

"I can't do it now. That's an end of it."

The next day Meggy went uptown again and got the medicines Dr. Lewis had prescribed. And a bleak March ran its way with raw, gusty winds and belated snow flurries. The lilac buds which had swelled in the early warmth, shrank in retreat before the unexpected cold. Once more the grasses looked wintry and dead, and spring seemed far off. Meggy, checking the days and weeks on the big kitchen calendar, hurried their passing in her thoughts, and she prayed long each night by her bedside that the time for the trip to the strange doctor might speedily come.

During the last week of March Tirzah caught a cold. In all her tortured questionings afterward, Meggy was at a loss to know how it could have happened. She applied the usual remedies with a desperate care and then decided one morning to call

the doctor even though it might be foolish. For the child was sleeping most of the time, and that seemed safe. When Dr. Lewis came, however, his movements were quick, and he banded no jokes. It was pneumonia, he said. Had probably been from the very first.

There was no struggle. It was all so quiet and so quickly over that the little brick house seemed to have been stirred by no break in its routine. Except for the fact that the parlor door was kept closed, that Alex came home from the mine at noon, and that, when the night fell at last, Meggy lay in the children's room instead of her own.

It was Meggy's wish that her old minister from New Salem be sent for. When he was ushered the next day into the small parlor McKelvey and Alex were with her there. The minister shook hands quietly, paused before the whiteness at the front window and then turning to Meggy said, "Let us seek help where alone help is to be found."

He knelt down, and Meggy followed. Alex and McKelvey remained standing, Alex's arms folded across his breast, McKelvey's thin fingers twisting behind his back. They stood together, their heads bowed, as though spectators of a scene in which they could not share.

Meggy's arms, with the hands locked, were outstretched, her head fallen upon them. So her slight body might have been flung from the torture of the rack.

The low tones of the minister went on and on. Old familiar phrases from Scripture and hymn were woven into the pattern of his deep supplication.

.
There like an Eden blossoming in gladness,
Bloom the fair flowers the earth too rudely pressed;
Come unto Me, all ye that droop in sadness,
Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.
.

He rose from his knees at last, and Meggy slowly rose too. The few simple "arrangements" were made. The burial would be in New Salem. The minister shook hands again, and Meggy went with him to the front door. Alex and McKelvey stood as they had been. They could hear the low tones at the door—the minister's steady voice, and Meggy's broken one. McKelvey slowly shook his head.

"Not all the preaching since Adam can make death other than death," he quoted heavily.

And Alex, in his stony silence, shook his head likewise in reply.

But when Meggy came back they saw that the heaven to which they could not reach had stooped to her need. Her face, although still graven white, was no longer convulsed with weeping. It was as though an angel's wing had touched it as she knelt. The men's eyes dwelt upon her with a sad wistfulness: the wonder of a mystery which they could not make their own.

When it was all over and they were alone again with Ranald in the brick house, Alex watched Meggy with a double desolation in his heart.

For she had no words for him except those that must needs be spoken, and at night when he got up restlessly from his desk and went upstairs, she was already lying as though asleep in the room with Ranald.

She did not reproach him. She never said, "If you had only gone with me to Pittsburgh when I begged you, this might not have come . . ."

She never spoke the words, but they were written in anguish upon her face.

Alex remembered now how through the years it had been Meggy's bright, eager voice that had lifted the dark moods from his own spirit; how it was her cheerfulness, forced perhaps for his need, that he had unconsciously counted upon through all the strain of his striving and anxiety. He had never realized before what this had meant to him. Now it was gone. But most

grievous of all to bear was the knowledge that in their common sorrow they were not united.

One evening she said quietly: "If you wouldn't mind, Alex, I think I'd like to take Ranald and go to the farm for a little while. I'm hungry for the look of the fields just now." Her voice sank lower. "Then I want to tell Granny all about Tirzah, how much she was talking these last weeks and all about her little ways, and how she looked at—at the last. I can tell her better than Mother can, and—"

"Meggy!" Alex's tone was hard. "Meggy, I tell you we can't go on this way, always thinkin' about—about what's past. We've got to put it behind us. I can't stand it." He had risen from his chair, and his voice was shaking. "It's all to be put by now, mind. That's the only way to do. An' you're never to talk to me of her—"

He stopped, for Meggy had risen too. He had never seen her in anger before. She faced him now in white fury.

"You shall not do this to little Tirzah," she said. "You shall not put her out of your mind the way you did your mother. I watched you, Alex. I knew what you were doing. You wouldn't speak of her. You wouldn't think of her even, if you could help it, because it brought you pain. It's like making them die twice over to refuse to think of them. It's cruel! You won't let yourself be hurt—that's the reason. That's the selfish reason. But I'll make you remember her! Every day as long as I live I'll be thinking of her, and I'll talk of her whether you like it or not. She shall not be shut away from us by this wall of your will."

The bitterness sat strangely upon her face.

"And I'll tell you this too, Alex MacTay. Every time I think of her I'll hate, hate the Magnus mine!"

She sank down, shuddering with terrible sobs.

It was the silence that roused her at last, for Alex did not speak. She looked up and met his eyes. He was gazing on her, himself broken, but stricken now anew by her anger and her accusation.

And as she looked at him she knew by the power of the love they bore each other that, when time had spent itself mercifully upon them, she would forgive this also, and lie again in his arms.

But not yet. Not yet.

CHAPTER VII

For two months Meggy stayed with Ranald at the farm and Alex drove out on Sundays. The slow days passed for her in the big kitchen, and in the familiar fields and woods. There were young lambs and new calves now, and one long-legged capering colt in the pastures; there were spring beauties and anemones pressing up through the matted winter leaves, and snowy drifts of dogwood blossoms among the dark trees on the hill.

Slowly to Meggy, the first utter blackness lifted and life became at least supportable once more. As though in compensation for her loss, the small Ranald seemed, if possible, dearer than ever to her heart. He was five now, full of interesting, childish conceits, and sensitively aware of beauty. He was aware, too, of the sorrow, and the shadow falling upon his mother's face was reflected often upon his own. Meggy knew in these days the full joy of her little lad. She watched his normal rosy health almost incredulously; she clutched to her heart his quick affection and sympathy; she saw now, as she had leisure for his constant companionship, that his mind had an imaginative quality beyond that of most children.

As the weeks passed the hard hurt in her heart toward Alex softened a little. He was suffering deeply, too, she knew. He had the empty brick house night after night, with all its memories, and he still felt shut out from her love. When at Sunday dinner the older folks would ask him why he did not come for the whole week end, Alex would only say quietly that he was very busy working in the evenings and just then could not spare the time. Meggy, with her eyes on her plate, understood, and

felt the tide of her love slowly beginning to creep in again across the barren sands; for his face was thinner now than she had ever seen it, and his eyes had the reddish unrest of sleepless nights.

By common consent they walked out together in the afternoons before he left. Even here, however, they were strained and silent. Once when they were far from sight of the house, he turned suddenly to her and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Meggy," he said, and his voice faltered on the words, "are you—are you feelin' any better?"

She sighed. "A little. Each day does something to me, I suppose. I'm better here at the farm for a while longer if you can manage."

"I'll be all right. It's only you that matters. When you feel you want to come back, will you tell me?"

"Yes."

"I'll never ask you." His voice was low, and the tenderness of it stirred Meggy's apathy.

"About your meals. Are you eating with Uncle Andy? You look so thin."

"Aye. I'm all right."

But she could not bring herself to ask about the mine.

Before they turned back to the house he stopped and looked at her with all his love in his eyes.

"Good-bye then, Meggy, for the now."

"Good-bye, Alex."

But there was no embrace. Meggy wondered that night as she lay alone in her room why the absence of it should have made her heart more tender toward him.

It was June when she returned to the brick house. Her beloved hills and fields had been kind to her. Her cheeks had a faint color again, and only the addition of a few fine lines about the eyes showed the graving of sorrow. She had had time for long thoughts by wood and stream as she wandered over the farm. She had considered deeply her relationship with Alex.

Once as with an illuminating flash the possibility of his own death had come to her. She knew then that this grief which she carried in her breast, this aching, yearning, unassuaged pain, was not the greatest that her heart could bear.

She felt something like shame at this knowledge, and struggled against the thought as though it were disloyalty to little Tirzah.

But as the passing days had flowed over her, bringing the warm winds from the ploughed fields, the cool quick rains at night, the punctual burst of blossoms, and the sweet insistent overtone of the young frogs' piping, she ceased struggling against herself; against Alex. She permitted an acceptance of her life as it was, to permeate her whole being. Perhaps, as Granny and her mother said, little Tirzah was too fair for this world. Perhaps in spite of anything they might have done her death was to be. For her sorrow then, resignation. For her love? Who could say but that the unconquerable nature which drove Alex in his ambition also measured in its strength the degree of his love for her? The power that had estranged her still bound her to him.

So Meggy came back at last without bitterness, and the quiet submission in her eyes brought a mist to Alex's own. Not even as a bridegroom had he been so tender, so untiring in his devotion. Through all that summer he did not work so constantly at his desk in the evenings. He often sat with her, or walked with her in their small garden. A delicacy, a sweet hesitancy like that of undeclared lovers still lay upon them. It was what Meggy needed to break down the last barrier in her wounded heart.

During this time neither of them spoke of the mine. Then gradually, as of old, Alex's talk centered upon it. Meggy understood even before he told her that the news was good. The peculiar abstraction which sat upon him when he was in heavy difficulty was gone now. He became, as the fall advanced, more like what he had been before the Magnus was started. The satisfaction of victory touched his smile, though by what bitter stress

it had been won, Meggy could only guess. He began his full confidences in the early fall by urging her to buy some new clothes.

"You can be gettin' something nice now, Meggy," he said. "I haven't talked much about it even to McKelvey, but I'm actually out of the worst of things now. In fact—" He hesitated with the Scottish inborn fear of "temptin' Providence," then went on in what was for him a reckless outburst of assurance. "In fact, I've been wantin' to tell you that the outlook's not bad at all. I've got some fine new orders for the winter, an' it looks as though—"

He stopped and caught her to him. "You're goin' to be rich some day, Meggy girl. You're goin' to have the best that money can buy."

Meggy drew a quivering breath.

"But I don't care so much about being rich, Alex."

"You will," he stated with finality. "Just you wait!"

September brought with it a national and a personal landmark. On Friday the 6th, a crazed Pole shot and fatally wounded President McKinley, thereby sending to the White House a man whose career McKelvey had followed with admiring interest, Theodore Roosevelt.

The personal landmark—for Meggy far outweighing the other—was that on the following Monday Ranald, freshly scrubbed and suited, with her kiss upon his cheek, started importantly for his first day at school. It was a hard day for Meggy. The silence of the house cried out to her, and the old bitterness rose in her heart. Never since the moment when the sweet body of little Tirzah had been lowered into the earth had she suffered as she did through that empty day. But she put her grief aside at noon-time and evening when Ranald came home boisterously excited over the novelty of his new experience.

It seemed but a very few weeks before he was reading. When she stopped at the school building one day after Christmas to walk home with him, the teacher, Miss Dorset, sent Ranald to

another room on an errand and then rather solemnly told Meggy that she had a phenomenally bright child.

"He's reading now away beyond the others, and he has such an imagination! Sometimes when the children get restless, I get Ranald to tell them a story. I've been wanting to ask you whether you have any unusual book of fairy tales you read to him or whether he really makes them up himself. The one about the peacock, for instance."

"The peacock?" Meggy echoed. "No, I never told him any story like that. I don't really read much to him at all. We talk a great deal together, of course. And once when I told him someone was as proud as a peacock, I remember, he asked me a great deal about what peacocks were and how they looked."

Miss Dorset smiled as though her happiest suspicions had been confirmed.

"I *thought* he was making it up! Well, all I can say is that he's a most interesting and gifted child . . . Ah, thank you, Ranald. Now you may go along with your mother. Good-bye, Mrs. MacTay."

Meggy repeated this conversation eagerly to Alex that night. He seemed to share her pleasure, but added later: "It's arithmetic an' figurin' I hope he takes to. That's what he'll need in the job I'll give him when the time comes."

In February Alex received another call from Jack White. He dropped in, as casual, friendly, and faintly amused with life as though he had been there but the day before.

"Hello, MacTay. How's the old hole in the ground? Say, you've certainly been expanding! Things in good shape now?"

"I'm fairly well satisfied."

Jack laughed. "I guess that's about as extravagant optimism as one could expect from a Scotchman! Well, I suppose you thought my last tip didn't come to much, eh?"

"About the anthracite strike?"

"Yes. They did strike last year, but it was all over before anybody knew it. Tell you what happened. Mark Hanna—you

know who he is, head of the Republican party—well, he went to Wall Street to the operators and bankers, and he said: 'Look here, boys, you're going to have a nice little strike on your hands while the political campaign is on, and if you're not careful McKinley may get licked and Bryan get in the White House yet with his free silver. Better pay your miners their 10 per cent increase than take that chance!' And by gum, they did it! But that's not the end of the strike business."

"You think there's a one still comin'?"

"I know it. The miners aren't satisfied yet by a long shot. Give them an inch, they want a mile. Don't know as I blame them, though, poor devils! They've got a damned hard job."

"Don't be talkin' so loud," Alex cautioned sharply.

"That's right," Jack said with a laugh. "Well, the hard coalers want still more wages, a shorter day and pay by weight instead of by the car."

"That's ridiculous."

"Maybe. But they're going to put up a real fight for it this time. This Mitchell, head of the United Mine Workers, is quite a fellow. Ever met him?"

"No, an' I don't want to."

Jack made an airy gesture.

"Well, I have. Nice chap with plenty of brains. What he wants is for the operators to come into conference with him. But the operators won't put their fine leather boots under the same table with the feet of any of the officials of the miners' union. Might be a smell of hobnails, you know. So, that's the deadlock at the present."

"I see it plain," said Alex seriously. "But you think it will come to a head in time?"

"Dead sure. Only, on your word of honor, keep my name out of this. There might be repercussions for me and my family."

"You've got my word it can't be delved out of me, an' many thanks to you. I don't mind tellin' you I'm in shape to handle

more business now. If this thing ever comes it'll put me where I want to be. An' I'll not forget your kindness, mind."

"That's nothing. I just thought when I was in town I'd drop around and mention that the trouble's still cooking. If I get an inside shot at the last I'll send you word."

"Aye, that'll be good of you. How have you been? I haven't seen you since the Spanish War. Did you get into it like you was intendin'?"

"Yes, indeed. Nice little scrap while it lasted. On the whole, though, I don't think war's what it's cracked up to be. I got their confounded malaria down in Cuba and came home as thin as a walking stick. Dad sent me on a cruise round the world to set me up. Funny thing, I got tired of that, too. I guess I can't even settle down to being footloose. How's your family?"

A faint shadow crossed Alex's face.

"We lost our wee girl last spring," he said with difficulty.

He was unprepared for the quick sympathy in Jack's eyes, the warm sincerity of his distress.

"I hadn't heard, MacTay. I'm mighty sorry. I'll send a message to your wife; but give her my regards meanwhile, won't you? It must be pretty ghastly for her—for both of you. A child, you know—I'm sorry, MacTay."

When he was gone Alex thought over his meetings with Jack. They had been brief and scattered sparsely through the years, but there was a quality in them that gave them deep significance.

"I doubt he's a friend worth havin'," Alex said to himself. "I'll be payin' more attention to him from now on."

Then he turned his mind to the news in hand. If ever the great anthracite mines in the eastern end of the state were tied up by a strike, it would mean one thing: it would mean that during that period the soft coal of western Pennsylvania would be at a premium. And now, if this happened, as though Provi-

dence had in the long run been arranging for it, the Magnus as well as the Scotia was in a position to take advantage of it.

Alex's breast swelled with such a feeling of triumph that every other emotion was banished completely. This, he knew, suddenly and surely, would be a climactic point in his career. All the worst of the struggle that had at times sapped the vitality of his body and all but broken his iron will, would be behind him. There would always be strain and responsibility, but perhaps not again the bitterness of uncertainty, the desperation of utter risk.

For the struggle had been bitter. They were calling him "the lucky Scot" around Greensburg. To the casual onlooker it seemed as though he had moved ahead with such prodigious steadiness that there was an element of the miraculous in it. Even Gilly kept repeating with a faint air of envy: "Ach, him! He's got the luck of a lousy calf! You can't stop him."

McKelvey was the only one who saw the truth more nearly. He knew of the long years of unremitting labor. Only a Scotchman's body could have borne the strain, physical and mental, that Alex had put upon his. A fire of intensity burned him and gave him no rest. It was the heat of this fire that made men do his bidding and bent events to the direction of his demand. Alex was still a young man, but he had permitted youth to make no claim upon him, other than that of love. Diversion as such, lightness, gaiety, relaxation, had had almost no part in his life since he had set himself upon his course. Gilly went home in the evenings to pitch horseshoes, and Pat to romp with his children. Even McKelvey, with his feet on his desk and his spittoon drawn near, lost himself in one of his favorite Latin classics. Alex's mind never fully relaxed except in sleep. It was not happy accident nor miraculous good fortune that had made the mines run smoothly at last, brought ever increasing new orders to their books, and caused the Pittsburgh coal and steel men to take special note of the "MacTay development out by Greensburg." It was the driving force of Alex's body and brain.

And for all of this, life and time and love itself had exacted toll.

But at a point, fixed for long in his mind as a first great goal, he could allow himself pause for satisfaction. This point was now perhaps in sight.

Another mood of imminent victory swept him. His desire for revenge upon Rockwell had never lessened. He could be patient while the slow processes of defeat went on, but he would never desist until the vanquishment was complete. He would have been ruthless in any case to a rival so dangerously near at hand. But added to this was an undying hatred of the man who had held him and Meggy up to public ridicule.

The gaining of Rockwell's old contract from Pittsburgh Iron & Steel had been the beginning. In the last two years he had succeeded in getting two others which he had every reason to believe crippled Rockwell still more. There was evidence that as the business of the Scotia and the Magnus grew in volume, that of the Rockwell dropped a little. With any inside information of a coming strike, Alex saw clearly that he would gain a new advantage over his enemy. How great this would ultimately be, he did not then guess.

He dropped in at McKelvey's that evening to discuss a matter that had lately been in his mind. Because of the peculiarly narrow margin on which he had worked from the start, he had sacrificed all personal comfort and convenience and even, he now felt, a certain degree of efficiency, in maintaining no city office. Gilly had a building of sorts at the Scotia with helpers as he needed them, and Alex had his own at the Magnus; but the time had now more than arrived when the volume of their business demanded a central operating point of some sort in Greensburg.

He found McKelvey in good spirits and decidedly agreeable to the new plan.

"You're right, Alex. I've thought of it before. What's wrong with the Central Bank Building? They've got the best offices

for rent just now. Rockwell's in the Greensburg Trust. I suppose you don't want to be next door to him."

"That I don't."

"I'll see about the thing for you if you want."

"That's good. I felt we might get settled by the first of April. Mebbe just a small room for a start. For a few months I'll divide the day between the offices. I'm wantin' to build Pat up to be superintendent of the Magnus, but I'll need my eye on him a bit longer."

"Just don't kill yourself, Alex. A live dog's better than a dead lion always. As to Pat, I think he'll work out all right there. The men all swear by him."

"That's his only fault. He may be a thought too easy on them. But if I'm behind him, pushin', we ought to get on."

Alex sat for a few moments silent, his hands deep in his pockets. McKelvey waited, knowing the signs.

"I've got something else on my mind," he said at last. "I've been doin' a lot of thinkin' lately about the farm."

"The Parkinson place?"

"Aye. It's a rich vein, that. An' I've just found out what I've been surmisin'. Dennim's farm's underlaid too." Alex's face darkened even now at the name. "An' the Houstons' is the same next to it."

McKelvey looked disturbed. "Now for heaven's sake, Alex, be sensible. You've got your hands full enough. Besides those farms lie away from the railroad. Rockwell might afford to reach them some day, but you couldn't. And on top of it all, Meggy loves the old place so, every stone of it. She'd never see it go."

"You think not?"

"Don't you know it yourself?"

"There might be a way fixed up to use the coal an' let the folks keep the place on."

"I doubt it. How's Meggy now?"

Alex's eyes softened. "She's been more like herself lately. I've

been gettin' her some more new clothes an' things for the house to take her mind up. Why don't you come on over with me an' see her? As to the farm business, we may just let it drop the now."

McKelvey picked up his hat.

"I believe I will. I haven't been over this week. And forget about that other coal, Alex. You can't mine all Westmoreland County!"

When they reached the brick house, Meggy met him, tremulous with emotion and delight. Her eyes were misty as though from recent tears, but her lips were smiling.

"Alex! Uncle Andy! You should see what just came for me! A special messenger brought a big box to the door with my name on it. I couldn't imagine what it was, and when I opened it— Look!"

She had hurried them with her into the parlor, where on the table a cloud of delicate pink roses filled a large vase.

"And here's the card! Alex, it's that Mr. White we saw at the Rockwells'—you know—who sent them. He must have just found out about little Tirzah. But wasn't it nice of him, kind of him to do it!"

The men studied the card. It bore the name: Mr. John Russell White. Below, was written in a fine backhand: "I have just heard of your sorrow. May I proffer my sincere sympathy."

McKelvey looked curiously at Alex.

"That's Jonathan White's son!"

"Aye."

"You know him?"

"Oh, I've seen him a few times. He's a nice chap an' all. He looked in at the office today."

"But how wonderful of him to send the roses, when he doesn't really know me!" Meggy cried. "Think of having roses in February, Uncle Andy." She pressed her face to the fragrant blooms. "Flowers always make me happy!" she added.

When he left, McKelvey gave Alex a shrewd look.

"I don't know what you've got up your sleeve now," he said, "but in the words of the Scriptures I think you're ploughing with the heifer somehow!"

Alex only smiled. But as he put out the lights later, his mind for once was not on business. He was realizing that Meggy had seemed more pleased over the flowers than over all the new clothes he had bought her that winter.

"I must mind to get her roses myself, some time," he thought, somewhat puzzled. "I guess I haven't paid much heed to flowers."

The spring that came on that year was one of those unreasonably beautiful ones that are dotted through a lifetime for remembering. A warm blended fragrance swept the garden where Meggy planted her seeds, for the first lilacs came before the last apple blossoms had faded. Meggy and Ranald stood often together enchanted before the miracle of the apple tree.

One afternoon he came running in from school with a paper in his hand.

"It's my very own," he cried as he gave it to his mother. "I did it all myself when I should have been working on my numbers. But when I showed it to Miss Dorset she wasn't mad a bit, and she read it out loud to the class, and she said I was to bring it straight home to you and not to lose it!"

"Why, what is it?" Meggy cried.

Ranald pulled her with him to the back porch.

"There," he said, pointing to the garden, "that's what made me! Why don't you read it?"

Meggy's hands were uncertain as she opened the paper. Something strange and wonderful was on it, she knew. Something out of her own heart and yet not of it.

She read it softly aloud, with the boy looking eagerly up at her. A childish little rhyme in uneven print about the apple tree. But still a rhyme, and Miss Dorset had sent him straight home with it! She read it again, then stooped to kiss him.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"It's lovely, Ranald. Just wait till Daddy sees it. He'll be so proud to think you wrote a rhyme all by yourself. My!"

Meggy kept saying it over as she waited for Alex to come. It was not entirely the output of a seven-year-old mind. There was something more: a word she had not realized he knew, a running lilt in that last line. All of it simple, childish of course, and yet with *something* given. She had watched him sometimes when his eyes, with their strange color like the waters of a lake, were fixed on the sky, on the hills, on the blooming apple tree. She had watched him and wondered at the intensity of the look until it suddenly broke and he ran off to his play like any other child.

But now, as she remembered, something warm, exciting and lovely touched her own scarred heart.

When Alex came she waited until they were all three ready to sit down to supper; then she took up the paper and told Ranald to give it to his father.

"A surprise!" she said with her eyes shining.

They watched together as Alex unfolded it, read it and then looked up.

"I made it up all by myself, Father," the boy said proudly.

A change passed over Alex's face. He read the rhyme again, then laid down the paper.

"Rhymes aren't for boys, Ranald," he said, though not unkindly. "Rhyme makin' is girls' work. You stick to your numbers."

For a minute there was silence, Meggy and the child watching him in amazed, unbelieving surprise. Then the boy spoke.

"Mother liked it, and Miss Dorset, so I don't care."

Meggy, her heart suddenly hot against Alex, began to talk with hurried brightness.

"Of course Father likes it too. Only he wants you to do better in your counting. Now come to your supper. It's such a nice one. All the things you like . . ."

How could Alex be so lacking in understanding as not to

praise the child! How could he fail to perceive something unusual in the little verse? An anger crept over her, but she kept it covered. She would speak to Alex later when Ranald was in bed.

When they were alone at last her voice quivered slightly.

"You paid so little attention to Ranald's rhyme, Alex! I couldn't have believed you wouldn't praise him for it! He has a gift, I think. He has such an eye for beauty. He just stands sometimes looking at something like the apple tree as if he forgot where he was—"

"Don't!" Alex's word was sharp as though from physical hurt.

He got up suddenly and left the room. He went out to the garden as he had done that breaking dawn when he had wrestled with his grief after the news of his mother's death. It was all upon him again now. And something else besides.

All the springtimes of his life seemed to flow over him as he stood there in the gathering dusk: the green enchantment of Tibbie's Glen; the wild fresh fragrance of the moors with the whin in blossom and the lark piercing the sky and his heart together; the smell of the rain as it blew in from the sea and settled in a slow beat upon the cottage roof at Lamson Green; those first two springtimes in America with the blooming locust trees on the hilltop and the rolling green of the wheat fields! All of this he had felt as though it were part of his blood. His very heart had leaped and ached because of it. Now for a long time he had known no spring as he once knew them. Not once had the old rapture risen.

He looked at the apple tree, standing whitely in the corner of the garden. Day after day he had walked past it without seeing it. But the boy had seen it—watched it with the eyes of Marget his grandmother and wrought of it in his childish way. Her spirit, then, was not dead. But it was gone from him. It dwelt now, he knew, in his son.

Strange thoughts beat upon him, strange words tore through his brain. It was as though they were saying: *You cannot kill*

the flame! You cannot quench the inward voice. It will live again, but not in you. You will be dead to it. Another shall feel the imperishable joy. Another shall tremble and travail to give Beauty words. But not you! Never you, again.

He remembered with something like bitterness that the child had looked at him with challenging eyes.

When he entered the house Meggy was waiting, anxious and distressed.

"What did I say, Alex, that hurt you? Was it something that reminded you—"

"Aye. It did put me a little in the mind of—my mother. It's all right, though."

He sat down and drew her to his knee. He held her close, his head against hers.

"I'm tired the night," he said heavily.

Meggy started. "In all the years I've known you I've never heard you say that before. You're not sick?"

"No. Just weary. I guess," he added slowly, "it's the spring."

Before another spring had come the main office of the Scotia and Magnus mines was established in some degree of elegance in the Central Bank Building. At McKelvey's insistence the first available office, a small room, was now exchanged for a large, permanent one, and he went about the furnishing of it with boyish zest.

"Here's where we've got to impress folks a little," he told Alex. So he ordered fresh paint and new desks with a good Axminster rug which he knew just where to buy, and contributed some mahogany bookshelves from his own bedroom. The whole effect was imposing.

"Mind, it's not a sittin' room we're havin' here," Alex adjured him occasionally; but he was enormously pleased over it just the same.

After a new door had been hung and lettered, Alex took Meggy up to see it one night when the building was empty.

He turned on the lights. In bold black and gold the words stood out.

THE SCOTIA MINING CO.
THE MAGNUS MINING CO.

A. MAC TAY, *President*

Meggy looked at it and then at Alex. There was elation in his eyes and an eager waiting for the answer in her own.

"I'm so proud of you, I don't know what to do!" she cried. "I can't believe it's you, Alex!"

They went inside, and all at once were like two children, as he showed her everything and she admired and exclaimed.

"This'll be my desk here," he pointed, "an' this one's for my stenographer. I'm havin' one of them, mind."

"A girl?"

"Na, na. A young chap out of business school. I can't be bothered with a girl around. Talkin' mebbe when I'm busy or gigglin'. No, I'll have no girl."

"Well," Meggy said slowly, "I guess I'm just as glad."

Alex looked at her quickly and then smiled one of his rare, tender smiles for her alone.

"A heap you'd need to worry! You know well I'd never even be seein' her—the way you mean."

"She'd be seeing you, I'll warrant," Meggy answered thoughtfully. "You're a very handsome man, Mr. MacTay!"

"Ah, stop your bletherin'," he replied laughing. "It's my wife's got the looks in our family! Here's where the records go: old orders—new orders. Now you'll be gettin' rid of all the clutter of papers in the parlor."

"Will you have to work here at nights, though?" she asked anxiously.

"Not much, I doubt. When I get things runnin' smooth, I'll stop at suppertime like the lave. Oh, I feel there's good times ahead, Meggy! The wind's blowin' my way now!"

He sat on the edge of the desk, his head high, his body taut, his face like a conqueror.

"Tell me, dearie," he said, "what you want most in all the world!"

He was looking off into space as though the glories of the earth were spread before him. He felt the power thrilling through him to lay these treasures at the feet of his love.

"Tell me," he commanded, "what you'd like most to have. If you could just wish an' get it, what would make you the happiest?"

He hoped suddenly that her answer would challenge every ability he had to pile fortune upon fortune. For he could do it. He saw it ahead of him. Triumph.

"You want me to say?" her voice asked hesitantly.

"I'm askin' you to tell me!"

"Surely you know," she answered very low. "Another child. A little girl—like Tirzah."

Alex turned slowly toward her, the tautness, the force gone out of his body. He watched her as though he had come back dazed from a far country. Her face was raised toward him, the full light shining upon the purity of her features, the gold of her hair and the thistle pinned at her throat.

He drew a deep breath.

"That'll be as God wills it," he said. "I was meanin'—other things."

They stayed a little longer; but, when they left, somehow neither of them looked back at the glory of the new door with the President's name upon it.

In the latter part of April Alex had a message from Jack White. It was cryptic but highly intelligible.

"Look for the balloon to go up near the middle of May. Sure thing this time."

Alex's eyes narrowed. There was a possibility, of course, that once again the strike might be settled. But from Jack's statement it looked as though the thing was a near reality.

"I'll take a chance on it," Alex said to himself. "I'll not be lettin' this information go to waste. It'll give me a start on the rest, especially on Rockwell."

He went straight to Gilly and Pat with the demand that, beginning at once, more men should be taken on at each mine and production speeded up as much as possible. After the orders on the books were filled the extra coal was to be piled in the yards to remain until further notice.

"Beyond this I can say nothing. You've got to take my word it's the thing to do."

"Well, why can't you tell us what's set you off like this?" Gilly growled. "Every time we get to runnin' real smooth you stir up some new kind of a collieshangie."

"Alex, it's takin' leave of your seven sinses you are! Haven't we gone through enough at the Magnus without takin' on more men to dig more coal than we can sell?"

"We'll sell it!"

"You've got new orders then?"

"No, but I'm takin' a chance we will, an' that's all I can tell you."

"You'll take one too many chances, my boy! Your luck won't last forever," Gilly blustered. "But I'm tellin' you I can't work the Scotia any harder than I am workin' her. An' what's more I'm takin' on no new men the now."

Alex's jaw set. "Them's my orders, an' if you don't carry them out—"

Pat, as often happened, broke the tension.

"All right, Alex, all right. Only don't look at us like the devil painted. How long are we to be workin' blind on this chance of yours?"

"Less than a month belike."

"Well, I'm glad it's no longer, as the old woman said when she swallowed the eel!"

For three weeks Alex kept driving the two mines as though with a whip and lash. Against every argument he kept hiring

more and more men. Pat was nervous and worried, and Gilly was infuriated almost to the point of coming to blows; McKelvey questioned and reasoned, but Alex went on hiring men.

On May 12th, the justification came. The anthracite miners in the eastern end of the state, to a man, went on strike. The daily papers carried the news in headlines. And with the news, like a frantic surging wave came the demand for soft coal.

On the day when all this became fully known Pat entered the old office at the Magnus where Alex was working for the moment alone, and faced him with something like a holy awe upon his face.

"If you weren't a damned heretic," he said, "I'd be sure the saints was blessin' you with visions! Did you know this was comin'?"

"I suspectit it."

"You can smell round a mountain, an' no mistake. Alex, do you realize what this is goin' to mean to us?"

For a moment the two young men looked at each other; then Pat gave a quick lunge, Alex countered it, and before they knew what they were doing their feet were stamping and whirling over the bare wood floor as they had done in the farm kitchen that first winter. They were restrained from bursting into song only by the knowledge that men were working near; but with all their strength they jigged and reeled in the sudden exuberance of their spirits.

Alex stopped first and signaled for Pat to desist also. Pat wiped his forehead and smiled broadly.

"Ah, you can still fling your feet around as nate as ever, glory be to God!" he said.

Alex had gone swiftly serious.

"If we make out as I'm bent we will in this strike business, you're goin' to be superintendent here, Pat, an' I'll put you up a new house. It'll take me all my time at the sellin' end from now on, I'm thinkin'. But you've done good work. You can handle the Magnus now as well as anybody."

Pat was silent a moment—strangely for him. Then he said slowly, "Do you mind the mornin' in Philadelpy when we landed, green as grass, sick from the crossin' an' lonesome like in the new land? Do you mind it, Alex?"

Alex shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I never think of it," he said shortly. "That's all behind me."

"Many's the time I think of it," Pat returned. "Sometimes when I'm after sayin' me prayers it comes back to me. It's good for a man to be carryin' his past along with him, Alex. It softens up the heart."

"I can't be bothered," Alex said. "It's the future I'm thinkin' about."

Something like fear crept into Pat's face.

"You haven't any other big bee in your bonnet, have you? Sure, you'll have now everything a man could dacently want for. Can't you settle yourself to enjoy the Lord's blessin' without grabbin' for more?"

Alex's blue eyes were very bright.

"There's bigger business to be done in coal than we've ever even got wind of yet. Last spring when Frick went in with Carnegie's company, do you know how many coke ovens he took over with him? Eleven thousand. *Eleven thousand* coke ovens, Frick had."

"An' what in the divil if he did?" Pat burst out. "You ain't expectin' to rub noses with Carnegie an' Frick, are you?"

Alex smiled his slow smile.

"They might hear of me afore I'm done," he said.

As the great strike continued every soft-coal operator was faced by one major need: cars. The coal, they had in abundance. Miners in large numbers were available. Orders were not only plentiful but overwhelming in size. But all of this meant nothing if they had no cars in which to ship their product. And the allotment of cars, by a curious and irrevocable tradition, lay in the hands of the car distributor, and back of him the division

superintendent of the Central Railroad Company. Alex and Gilly had learned this well. McKelvey had always known it.

"Pray for the cars, man," Gilly kept saying during the first weeks of the strike when they were all straining every nerve for tonnage. Alex's daring coup in taking on new men before the strike was declared gave the Scotia and Magnus an immediate advantage. Their first order from the eastern area was filled and shipped the day it arrived. A tremendous excitement had infused itself throughout both mines. That strange elation which an adverse wind always blows towards those who are not suffering from it, was now doubled in intensity since actual profit was in its wake. The miners were being paid well for their overtime and dug with furious zest deeper and deeper into the rooms.

Gilly and Pat, both stimulated by their own hopes of gain, were tireless at their jobs, while McKelvey neglected his law to drive out daily and watch the activity at the Scotia, or stood on Greensburg street corners, his silk hat slightly at an angle, to discuss with his colleagues the respective attitudes of Baer and Morgan and Mitchell and to conjecture what part if any Theodore Roosevelt would take in the situation.

Alex, after his first reckless abandon in the Highland fling, settled into a steady, overpowering concentration that shut everything else from his mind. Once again Meggy felt the tension each evening, though not as before the stress of uncertainty or fear. Alex was gripped now by the pressure of an exciting warfare in which the end was reasonably assured.

When the first car shortage was felt he made a prompt decision.

"I'm goin' up to Pittsburgh to see Dave Ferris," he announced one day. "We can't be held back this way."

When he reached the office of the division superintendent he went straight to the point. It was always this lack of traditional indirection which surprised business men in Alex.

"Mr. Ferris, I'm MacTay from the Scotia and Magnus mines out by Greensburg. We're needin' more cars. Could you say a word to the car distributor for us an' see that we get them?"

David Ferris looked as though Alex had entered his office naked.

"Well, Mr. MacTay, you don't waste words, do you? Won't you have a seat?"

Alex nodded and sat down. Ferris toyed with a pencil.

"Now, MacTay, as to this matter of the cars. You must realize that with the enormous amount of coal business we're carrying now due to the strike every operator is crying out for cars. All the distributor can do is to divide them around as equably as possible. There is bound naturally to be temporary shortage here and there, but we try to do the best we can for everyone, you understand!"

Alex made no reply. He only looked at the man behind the desk, with his blue eyes clear and cold, as though what had been said had no bearing whatever on the case.

David Ferris moved slightly under the look and studied the man before him more carefully. He had heard of him before.

"You have two pretty strong mines out there?"

"We have. An' we're gettin' the tonnage out."

Ferris stroked his chin.

"The railroad company is in the market for coal as of course you know. We're interested in buying some just now. Naturally we could not pay market price." He eyed Alex for a moment, then looked out the window. "We should want it at the regular railroad price."

There was silence. Alex thought fast.

"I'll supply you, Mr. Ferris."

The two men then looked at each other for a long moment.

"How much could you let us have?"

"That depends," said Alex.

Their lips were relaxed now. The cards were on the table. The game was proceeding.

"Two days' output a week?"

"I think we can manage it. If we have the cars."

"Yes, the cars. I'll see if I can't do something about that for you, MacTay. As to the coal—I guess we won't need any contract."

"I guess not. When do you want first shipment?"

"The sooner the better."

"Aye. The strike won't last forever." There was a hint of irony in Alex's voice, but his countenance did not change. "An' you'll keep an eye out for plenty cars for us?"

"Oh, the cars! Right. I'll make an immediate note as to that!—Well, good day, MacTay. Glad you came in."

"Good day, sir. So am I."

When Alex told his story to his confreres Gilly was at first furious with surprise.

"Man, you've gone loony to let him hook you for that. Sellin' him at the railroad price! Just now! Why, that's throwin' money away. I'll bet there's not another coal man in the whole district would do it."

"Aye," said Alex eagerly. "That's just the point! I don't think either there is. I doubt he's tried them all, an' they didn't see through it! He's not buyin' all this coal for the railroad. No fears! He's gettin' a bit sugar for his own tea. But I'm gettin' the cars! An', man, if I get enough of them I can afford to give him his coal."

Gilly gave him usual shake of the shoulders while slow admiration settled on his face.

"I take it back, Alex! I take it back. You were never born on a Sawbath!"

The next day a full supply of cars arrived at the Magnus, and the following as many at the Scotia. From that time on there was no shortage. Steadily as though delved and handled by giants under ground, the coal emerged from the mines in the long "trip" of wagons, and was hoisted into the waiting cars and started on its way. A mechanical efficiency wasted no second of

the long days. The amount of tonnage shipped amazed even Alex himself. As week followed week and the summer months passed, he knew that his first great goal was in sight.

One day as he worked in the main office, his young secretary came in, smiling.

"I heard Rockwell talking to some men up at the bank," he said.

"What was he sayin'?"

"The other men were telling him he must be coining money nowadays on account of the anthracite strike; and Rockwell said: 'We would be if we had any way to ship our coal! Every operator in this whole district is short of cars, but that Scotch devil, and God only knows how he gets them!'"

Alex chuckled.

"How's he lookin' these days—Rockwell? I haven't seen him for a while."

"A little seedy, I think," replied the young man.

By the end of the summer the strike was still on, and practically no mined anthracite coal left in the country. In September what little there was in New York City sold for thirty dollars a ton as against five in ordinary times. And the soft-coal price jumped accordingly. With the prospect of cold weather facing them, the cities most affected by the strike grew desperate.

From every quarter came appeals to Theodore Roosevelt begging him to try to mediate between the strikers and the operators. McKelvey was nervously excited these days. Not only was he elated over his own growing fortune and Alex's amazing success, but as a student of national affairs he was following the story of the strike from day to day with his keen mind alert to the hidden forces that underlay it.

"I think," he announced to Alex, "that something's going to come of these appeals for mediation. That 'damned cowboy in the White House,' as Mark Hanna calls him, will be a match for all of them. *There's a man, Alex! There's a man for you!*

Now we'll just watch and see him get these fightin' cats together."

But Alex was not interested in McKelvey's political enthusiasms.

"I don't care what any of them do," he said, "as long as they aren't in too big a hurry doin' it."

By the middle of October the basis was laid for a settlement of the strike. Currents and crosscurrents had run fiercely, but by a humorous stroke of genius on the part of the President, they had been tactfully blended at last to the extent that the anthracite miners resumed work toward the end of the month.

When it was all over, Alex took time off to straighten up his affairs and reckon his gains. In Colonel Selden's private office in Pittsburgh he received congratulations now not as a youth of promise but as a recognized industrial financier. He was worth now, according to the Colonel's own computation, almost a million dollars, and he was in his thirty-fifth year. The Magnus mine at last had turned the trick.

"What next, Alex?" the Colonel asked familiarly. "More expansion?"

"There's plenty good coal land untouched yet, on out beyond Rockwell."

"Rockwell's running a bit slack, I hear."

"That's what they say."

Suddenly there leaped into Alex's mind full born a new vision. All his tentative speculation on the coal underlying the old farm and those adjoining it focused in one dazzling moment in reality. He saw the Rockwell works as the center of another new development . . .

"I'll be expandin' more as the years go on," he said now, a strong light in his eyes.

"I fancy so," the Colonel answered. "Well, you've some capital of your own to play with now, and I needn't tell you there's always ready backing for you here. You're one of my own best investments, Alex, and I'm very proud of you!"

That night at home they had a little feast of jubilation. Alex,

still remembering Meggy's look, had brought some roses with him from the city and there was candy for Ranald. He told Meggy later how matters stood with him financially, and his heart glowed over her amazement and pride.

"Why, I never dreamed," she kept repeating, "I never once thought you had so much . . . Why, it's like a fancy fairy tale! Do other people know that you're—that we're rich, Alex?"

"Some of them. You're pleased, Meggy?"

"Why, I'm just about dazed over it! I always thought you meant years and years from now you might have a lot of money. But now—"

"We'll be gettin' more new furniture, or movin' to a larger house now if you like."

Meggy considered. "I like this one. Let's stay here and just relax—just be happy together. This—this amount you have now is what you set out to earn, isn't it, Alex?"

"Aye, that's right. An' I'm nearly a year ahead as it is."

"Then you've got now what you been working for."

Meggy drew a quivering breath. Something young and light-hearted came back into her face. She laughed.

"I don't know when I've felt so happy! Now you won't have to plan and worry over the business. You can just go to work like other men and come home at night and forget it. . . . I can't quite explain to you how happy I am. It's like struggling up a long hill with a burden on your back; and then all at once you're at the top, and off rolls the burden, and before you lies the nice level road—"

She broke off. Alex would suppose, of course, she was thinking of the money, and she would tell him no differently.

Her eyes were brighter than he had seen them in years.

"Didn't I tell you you'd be pleased, Meggy?"

"Oh, I am! I could shout! I could dance!"

She twirled about the room while Alex's eyes followed her with delight. This was like the old gay Meggy, looking at him with coquettish fun in her glances.

They were foolishly, ridiculously happy all that evening. Years and sorrow dropped from them.

"It's always going to be like this now," Meggy said when the quick little clock struck twelve and they sat, hands clasped, beside the fire. "Always like this! Oh, Alex, I can hardly wait to go to the farm to tell them the big news!"

Alex suddenly straightened.

"Ah, Meggy, I had a great idea today! I've been thinkin' a lot about the farm lately. . . . It's got a rich vein of coal under it, as you know."

"The farm!" Meggy whispered the word.

"Aye, an' so's the ones nigh-hand it—Dennim's an' all."

His face was tense again now, his eyes cold and determined.

"I see it all plain. I'll get hold of the Rockwell works some day—he's losin' to me now all the time; then I'll work the farms from there. They ought to be good for two hundred ovens!"

"Not—our farm?"

"Aye. Why not? The folks could live on in the house. I've thought that out. Reserve enough coal to keep the buildin's safe, an' the money they'd get would put them comfortable for the rest of their lives. It's all in the future, mind, but I just thought I'd tell you. I'll soon be gettin' to work on it."

Meggy said no word.

"Well," Alex went on cheerfully, "I'll be puttin' out the lights."

She sank down by the window, looking out at the flying clouds in the chill November moonlight. She felt suddenly too weak to rise when Alex returned to her.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "Too much cuttin' up, I doubt. Here, I'll carry you up stairs."

He lifted her in his strong arms tenderly and did not see in the darkness that her face was white. For Meggy it was not the stairway they were starting to climb, but the long steep hill whose top, she realized now, would always be just out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER the shock of that evening, Meggy quietly set about gathering her forces together. Her worst fear in regard to the fate of the farm had been somewhat appeased, for when she had raised the subject the next day her distress sobered Alex.

"We'll mebbe find a way out of that," he had promised, "when the time comes."

But there remained with her the knowledge that, in spite of all the adjustments which her life with Alex had already demanded of her, the greatest was still to come. For night after night now, he kept talking in a new tone of the future. It was as though he felt justified at last in bringing forth all his hidden ambitions. With his voice low and his strong hands interlocking before him he discussed his plans. It was not only that he had set himself to become a rich man; he wanted industrial authority; he wanted to be recognized by men in high places; he wanted to know for himself the satisfaction of power in this locality and, later, in Pittsburgh. He wanted a fine big house with plenty of servants some day—one something like the Laird's back at Lamson. He wanted Meggy to wear beautiful clothes and entertain like the big bugs and be a great lady. He expected Ranald to grow up and take hold of the business with him, so that eventually it could be MacTay & Son.

These were Alex's ambitions as he brought them forth week by week after the achievement of his first great goal. And even as Meggy listened with disquietude in her heart a great pride in her man rose in spite of her. His strength, his resolution, his accomplishment, even his iron determination for the future cast a

spell upon her, for she knew that to her and to her alone the hardness of his nature softened to love.

Through the days as she pondered on the new outlook she sighed often, remembering the innocence of that year on the farm when she had first felt herself drawn by the force of the young stranger. In a half-shamed maiden dream then she had pictured them, herself and Alex, married and living on in half of the old house! She saw Alex coming in from the fields or the coal bank; she saw herself running to meet him; she saw their children playing under the apple trees. Into the dream had gone unconsciously the sights and scents and sounds that were dear to her: the bleat of the young lambs; the spring rains on the purple lilacs by the gate; the warm July days, when the air was thick with the sound and the smell of the threshing, and the kitchen was full of preparations for the big dinner served once a year to the harvesters; the smoky, winy scent of the autumn with its apple picking and cider making; and that peculiar cozy hush of winter nights when from the depths of a feather bed one watched the firelight shadows from the open grate playing upon the walls while the snow for miles lay white and unbroken outside. These were the accompaniments she had supposed their life would have. And her heart ached with tenderness at thought of them.

As it was, the little brick house with its comfortable furnishings and dignified location was as remote from these first imaginings as the great house to which Alex aspired was from the brick. The trouble, as Meggy had come to know, was that a first dream never really dies. She could pretend to bury it, but in the stillness of the night it would live again with a young, homesick sweetness and, with its withdrawal, leave the coming day less than fair.

But Meggy was a sensible person, and the strong practical strain of her heritage came to her rescue. No one's life was ever exactly as it had been planned. Besides, since she realized now that no goal would be an ultimate one to Alex, and that he

would never relax from his furious striving, she must accept with what degree of satisfaction she could the amazing quality of her own position. Most important of all, she must prepare herself for that station which Alex was bound they should eventually reach. With seriousness and purpose she must set herself to be the wife of a rich man—a very rich man. Above all things, Alex must never find her lacking; if he mastered forces, so must she.

She considered first their present household. Ever since the days of her weakness before Tirzah's birth, the strong country-woman Susan had helped her from time to time. She was kindly, ignorant and heavy-handed. She always ate her meals with Meggy and Ranald when Alex was away. When he was there she "waited" on the table in clumsy country fashion. She looked upon Alex with awe and kept out of his way as much as possible. Just now she wanted to return home for a time to nurse her aged mother, and Meggy, with something of a pang, felt she should let her go for good.

She knew already from intimate glimpses into her neighbors' homes that things were run differently there. There were no "hired girls." There were servants who wore a special sort of dress, and who did not visit with the family. Indeed, Meggy already knew much more about city living than she had put into practice. She decided now was the time to use all her knowledge and acquire more. And with the decision came a feeling of strangeness, as though the door to a well loved and habitual room had closed behind her.

All through that year she kept herself at her new task. Her quick eye and instinctive good taste made her an apt learner. She went shopping in the Pittsburgh stores several times with Alex, sauntering slowly through the various departments, asking many questions, then soberly noting down quality and prices in a little green book she carried. She made use now of every possible opportunity as it suggested itself to see the inside of the important houses in Greensburg. There were ways, she discov-

ered, now that she had put her mind to it. A church tea at the pillared mansion of the Hathaways; a brief call at the Kendalls' as a member of a committee—for she had begun again her regular church attendance. Even Ranald served as a pretext, for he played with all the children on the Hill and Meggy, going to seek him, now made gentle overtures to the mothers where before she had remained in the distance. As time went on she knew she had made progress. She had glimpsed the interiors of a number of the town's select homes and noted the details in the little green book; while, over and above her new knowledge, like a rose-colored image hung the memory of Sally Rockwell's house, the beauty of which even the bitterness of that evening had never obliterated.

She still passed Sally occasionally on the street. They had stopped to speak but once again. That was just after Sally heard of the death of the child. On that day as before, Ranald and Cynthia had played together while Sally's dark eyes looked sincerely into Meggy's and a few broken words were exchanged.

For the last two years, however, there had been no conversation. When the children shouted to each other as they passed, they were restrained by their mothers and kept on their respective courses. For Sally and Meggy, along with the rest of Greensburg, knew now that a feud existed between the owner of the Rockwell mine and the owner of the Scotia and Magnus. Sally had watched a hounded look growing in her husband's eyes; Meggy had seen the sharp vindictiveness in Alex's. The balance of power was shifting, and the women were vaguely aware of it. So now they passed with distant courtesy, each stung with embarrassment by her own knowledge.

Very gradually Meggy began to make purchases: some new silver, a good rug for the parlor, an oil painting for the space above the mantel. Alex had chosen the latter out of a roomful of pictures—a rolling stretch of breakers against a rocky coast with a lighthouse in the distance. They had both blanched a little over the price when the salesman quoted it.

"I like the looks of it. Aye, but I do," Alex said, considering. "An' it pays to get good things when you can."

"The Greggs have a painting of the sea over their mantel," Meggy said in a low voice.

"We'll be takin' it," Alex decided quickly.

A new servant, a Swedish woman, was now installed in the house. She wore a neat uniform and knew how a home of wealth should be run. She was tall and dignified and moved about her kitchen like a remote vestal virgin. The first time Bill appeared at the back door after her advent, she ordered him away frigidly. When she finally discovered the relationship she covered her surprise and showed him with ceremony into the parlor, where Bill sat in miserable discomfort staring at the new rug until Meggy came downstairs.

"Who's that new shemale you've got out there?" he inquired wrathfully.

"Hush, Father. Don't talk so loud. Her name's Anna. She's the new"—Meggy hesitated but clarity was essential—"hired girl."

"Well, I don't like her," Bill announced. "She acted like she thought I was a tramp or somethin'. When's Susan comin' back?"

"I don't think she'll be back, Father."

"You mean you've got this here iceberg for good?"

"I guess as long as she's satisfactory. You see, now that—now when Alex's getting on, we have to do things a little—"

"Now you're rich you have to put on airs. That it?"

"It's not airs," Meggy said, distressed. "It's just that we have to do things in a little nicer way, maybe."

Her distress as always softened Bill at once. He tried manfully to cover his own feelings.

"Sure, Meggy. I know how it is. Just you go ahead an' put on all the style you can. Your mother an' the old lady'll be tickled when I tell them how fine you are. Well"—turning his old hat

round and round in his hands—"I guess I'd better be gettin' on. Days are kinda short."

"But, Father, you've just come," Meggy cried. "Wait, and I'll get you a cup of tea. Why, we haven't had a chance to talk yet."

But Bill was gently obdurate.

"I really gotta go, Meggy. I got—I got some errands to do."

When he was gone, Meggy sat heartsick in her fine parlor.

She had loved her father's visits with their deep flavor of home. She knew that they had been bright spots to him as well, and served as the constant link between her and the women on the farm. For Granny had never been in her house and never would be, and in the last years Tirzah, troubled with rheumatism, came seldom. Meggy's own visits to them could not take the place of Bill's frequent trips as messenger. He was in the habit of appearing at the kitchen door once or even twice a week with a little basket of fresh eggs, a jar of buttermilk or a loaf of homemade bread. He would settle himself comfortably by the kitchen table, telling his news with gusto, chaffing Susan, whom he had known all his life, opening the door frequently to eject tobacco juice, and then settling again to his stories with his chair tilted against the wall. Susan had enjoyed the visits as much as Meggy.

But now, with Anna in the kitchen, all was changed. Meggy had not realized until that day how great the change was. For the kitchen itself was no longer a place to sit down for a comfortable family visit while a pie baked in the oven. It had become, in some subtle way, at once Anna's personal and professional domain. Meggy herself had the feeling of a trespasser now if she lingered within it. Her father, with his tobacco and the faint reek of the stable and the fields upon him, would have no place whatever there.

For two weeks Bill did not come and Meggy suffered. She did not tell Alex, for she could not bear the risk of his not under-

standing her distress. Then suddenly the solution came. She told Anna that from then on she was to have the whole day off on Thursday each week instead of a few hours in the afternoon. Anna's aloofness was almost broken down by this unexpected consideration; while Meggy dispatched a hasty note to the farm telling of the new plan and saying she would expect her father the following Thursday. Thus, in so far as she could, Meggy brought the old days back. But she saw, even though Bill came regularly week after week, that a faint reserve was growing in his eyes.

Alex's first request for a guest came as a surprise to Meggy. As usual he had thought the matter through before he mentioned it.

"Now since we're fixed up so nice, I'd like to ask Jack White to visit us. He's been good to me an' I'd like to be showin' him some little favor."

"But Alex! All the way from Philadelphia?"

"He rides on a pass, and he's always on the go somewhere. He thinks nothing of goin' to a party in Pittsburgh. I was talkin' to McKelvey about it, an' he says you're the one to invite him."

"Me?"

"Aye. Write an' ask him for a Saturday night dinner and to stay all night if he will. McKelvey says to say 'spend the week-end' instead of 'stay over Sabbath.' That's the way they say it in the old country as well. 'The Laird's gone to Edinburgh for the week end.' I mind it now."

Meggy was still hesitant.

"Of course I'll write if you say so. . . . I liked him—but I think he's a little *different* from us."

Alex nodded.

"Aye, but we're goin' to be different too, afore we're done. Write him the letter tonight, why don't you?"

It was dispatched in Meggy's careful slanting schoolgirl hand. They awaited the reply anxiously.

Meggy felt a little thrill of pleasure when it came, remembering the roses and Jack's friendliness at the reception.

He wrote that he would be unable to spend the week end but would be delighted to come to dinner on Saturday the 14th.

Through all the preparations for the great day, Anna was a tower of strength. Her suggestions were given respectfully but with complete assurance, and Meggy leaned upon her superior knowledge. With a fierce intensity unusual to her nature Meggy wanted this dinner to be a success. It was the first time Alex had placed upon her a definite responsibility in connection with his business. For this was such. Aside from genuinely liking Jack White, Alex felt that his friendship with him had been an asset and would continue to be so. Over and over he kept saying: "I want to entertain White like the way he's used to. I want him to see we know what's what. Spare no expense, mind!"

Meggy was nervous as the day approached. She practiced going to meet her guest, her hand outstretched, her head held high. She recalled the attitude of Sally Rockwell.

"Mr. White! How nice to see you, and how good of you to come! Won't you sit down? . . . How's the weather in Philadelphia?"

She had bought a new dress for the occasion, a cornflower blue. Each time she tried it on, her cheeks flushed with pleasure; for the dress had evidently been cut by an artist and foreordained for her. It had puffed elbow sleeves, sweeping ruffles and a short train. As far as her appearance went Meggy's heart told her Alex would be satisfied.

On the morning of the 14th Alex, too, was nervous.

"I've got to be out at the Magnus today, so I won't be home till late. You're sure you're fixed right for everything?"

"Everything's fine," Meggy assured him. She meant to make him proud that night!

"What's wrong with Anna?" he asked. "She looks mad-lookin' or something."

"Oh, she's just busy," Meggy answered.

As the day passed on, however, Anna's apparent glumness disturbed Meggy too. She had heard of servants who grew irritable when guests were imminent; but Anna had seemed so interested, so pleased over this occasion to show her skill.

By late afternoon the house was in a state of perfection, the table laid for dinner, the plates for the various courses stacked in the pantry, the turkey in the oven, the vegetables in their pans. Meggy turned her attention then to giving Ranald some last-minute instructions as to his behavior.

The boy had grown rapidly in the last years. He was nine now, tall and strongly formed, with his handsome head set finely on his shoulders. He and Meggy were close companions. He brought her all his rhymes, and she like Marget back at Lamson kept them treasured in a scrapbook. They were real verses now. His teacher spoke of them with a tinge of awe and showed them surreptitiously to the principal. Uncle Andy of course read them with delighted pride. But they were never shown to Alex. It was Ranald himself who prevented this.

"Promise you won't, Mother. He won't like them. Please promise, Mother."

Meggy kept her word, but she worried over the secret. It was the outward sign of an inner lack of sympathy between Alex and the boy. Meggy had long been aware of this, and yet it was such a subtle thing that no one unattuned by great love for them both would have guessed it. Alex was outwardly a good father; Ranald was outwardly an obedient child. But deep underneath Meggy, watching them together, was aware of a constraint that had begun early and seemed to increase with the years.

"Well, Ranald, how did you get on at school the day?" Alex would inquire somewhat perfunctorily of an evening.

"All right, Father."

"How's the arithmetic goin'?"

"It's all right."

"Well, keep hard at it. You'll be needin' it when you grow

up. Now—take your engine out to the other room. I've got work to do here."

But before this brief interview Ranald would have given his mother a different report of his day, to the effect that the teacher said his composition was the best in the room but in the arithmetic test he had just passed; that Nicky Nelson brought a dead mouse to school in his pocket and Bill Hart had the measles; that Cynthia Rockwell was so smart she'd skipped a grade and was in his room now; that the black spot over his eye wouldn't wash off because that's where Warty Miller hit him—it hadn't been much of a fight, he'd only called Warty a liar. . . . Well, it was a lie. Cynthia wasn't a stuck-up punkin lily. . . . No, he hadn't hurt Warty, well, not much, anyhow, and a fellah had to fight sometimes. . . . Yes, he'd try to remember. . . .

So the small secrets of his heart, in so far as they were communicable, Ranald shared with his mother.

Today she told him again just what he was to do that evening; then, acting as the guest, she entered the room and Ranald shook hands politely, remembering to say "sir."

"And after we're through dinner you may come into the parlor and sit with us for a little while—only remember just to speak when you're spoken to."

"Won't I get any turkey?"

Meggy's face sobered. This problem had weighed with her though both Alex and Anna at separate times had told her she was foolish.

"You see, dear, the turkey is to be carved at the table and it wouldn't look nice to have a piece already taken off it when it's brought in."

"Sort of mussed-up-looking?"

"Yes. So if you'll just be good about it you can have all you want tomorrow. But you'll have ice cream tonight. Won't that be fine?"

Ranald sighed. "I'd like to sit with the company like I always do when Uncle Andy's here."

"But this is different. This is to be a very stylish dinner, just for grown-ups. Uncle Andy's coming tonight, too. You can talk to him later. Now come, and Anna will give you your supper while I dress—"

A sharp clatter from the kitchen made them both jump. Meggy rushed out to find Anna sitting with her head upon the table and a broken plate at her feet.

"My goodness, Anna!" she cried. "What's the matter?"

The remote Anna slowly raised her face. Meggy saw now that the expression upon it was not glumness, but real distress.

"My head goes around—all the time goes around. I cannot stand up. I fall down. I have tried for two days to keep on my feet—till after the dinner! Oh, Mrs. MacTay, I am ashamed to fail you, but I cannot any more stand up—"

Meggy fought down her own panic while she helped Anna up the stairs to bed, accompanied by the latter's wail of grievous humiliation. The maid next door had the grippe, and Anna had gone in to see her. . . . Always she was so well, so strong, she never thought . . .

Meggy returned to the kitchen, her face pale, her lips set. This was no minor disaster to her, and certainly it would not be so to Alex. The beautiful dinner, which was to have been served as were the dinners in great houses, would now be a failure. And she and Alex would again know something of the defeat of that other evening,—the uneasiness, the self-consciousness, the wounded pride.

She stood, desperate, thinking of expediences. Could she rush into a neighbor's house, tell of her plight and borrow a maid? She knew she could not. Another sort of pride prevented that. The clock on the wall increased her feeling of helplessness. At any moment Alex would return, and the guest of honor himself would arrive in an hour.

Meggy drew a quivering breath, and set to work. She made

the thickening for the gravy, tested the tenderness of the turkey, and seasoned the vegetables. The soup, Anna's specialty, was put on to heat, and the last touches put to the salad. She heard Alex coming through the hall.

"Meggy!" he called, with unwonted gaiety. "Oh, Meggy!"

"Here," she answered in a small voice. "I'm in the kitchen."

"What's the matter?" he asked quickly at sight of her. "Where's Anna?"

"She's sick, Alex. It's terrible, but it's true! I've just got her to bed."

Alex's face was suddenly furious.

"She'll get out of bed if I have to pull her out! Leavin' us in the lurch like this. Go up an' tell her I said—"

Meggy broke in quietly.

"She can't. She's really sick. It's not her fault, only— Oh, it just seems cruel it had to happen like this! But I'll do the best I can. Please don't worry too much, Alex. Don't feel too badly!"

She saw the really bitter disappointment and dismay in his face, and it hurt her beyond words.

"An' him comin' all this distance," he said slowly. "Well, we maun just make the best of a bad business."

Meggy put on the new blue dress without seeing it, fastening it with hands that shook from haste and nervousness. Her hair, she realized vaguely, looked well enough as it was. She dashed back to the kitchen, enveloped herself in an apron and proceeded with the dinner. Alex looked in bleakly to see if there was anything he could do, then returned to the parlor to await the guests.

McKelvey came first and, before he had more than arrived, Jack. Meggy could hear his hearty voice.

"Well, MacTay. This is kind of you! Awfully glad to see you, Mr. McKelvey. I've heard my father speak of you often . . ."

She liked the open friendliness of his tone. It reassured her somewhat. But it was Alex's disappointment she minded. The first time he had counted upon her to help him. everything had

gone wrong! . . . Alex was so proud—it was natural for him to want to show Jack White that he lived well. She had even planned conversation for the dinner table: she, presiding as the gracious hostess, would inquire what Mr. White thought of Fletcherism, and whether he had read “The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come”; she had a limerick in mind, too, if Uncle Andy started on them as he sometimes did . . . Now, she would be jumping up and down every few minutes just as though they were eating in the farm kitchen!

She knew she must go in for a moment and speak to her guests, and so she flung her apron off hastily and went to the parlor. But when she reached it she forgot her practiced greeting. She forgot to advance decorously, hand outstretched, head held high à la Sally Rockwell. She simply appeared, sheathed in the blue dress, and stood a little shyly in the doorway against the dark velvet portiere, her cheeks flushed from the stove, her shining hair loosened a little about her face. The height of subtlety and sophistication could not have produced a more striking effect.

For a fraction of a second the three men, standing with their backs to the fire, looked at her with eyes that took full note of her beauty; then Jack hurried forward.

“Mrs. MacTay! You don’t know what a pleasure this is!”

“Oh, Mr. White! I’m so glad to see you, but—”

“But what?” he asked, smiling.

There was in his eyes the strange gentleness which she had noticed before. It was disarming. She found herself telling him all about it.

“. . . there was no time then to get anyone else, so I’m afraid I’ll have to be in the kitchen for a little while if you’ll excuse me.”

Jack promptly offered her his arm.

“I’ll escort you there,” he said with a ceremonious bow. “Excuse us, gentlemen.”

Meggy could only laugh feebly and go along. When they

reached the kitchen, instead of turning back at the door Jack followed her in, settled himself comfortably astride the high stool and drew a breath of evident satisfaction.

"Mrs. MacTay, this whole little contretemps was arranged by Providence for my special pleasure! Sort of hard on poor old Anna, but still— Do you know, none of the other women who ask me to dinner have kitchens!"

Meggy paused to look up at him in amazed question.

Jack shook his head solemnly. "No kitchens. They just ring bells or give orders or something, and food appears. Like manna. I hate manna. And I love a kitchen. Been wanting to get in one for years and now—here I am!"

"I think you're a very considerate person," Meggy said gently.

"But I'm not just being polite! I mean it. When I was a little boy I visited my grandmother, and I thought her kitchen was the nicest room in the house. I've never gotten over that. Only, as I say, I never can find a kitchen any more. Dad and I live in an apartment hotel— Why, who's this fellow?"

Ranald, sensing that the etiquette plans were not being carried out according to the first intention, had appeared at his side and was gently nudging his elbow.

"Oh, you haven't seen Ranald," Meggy said. "Shake hands with Mr. White, dear."

The stranger and the boy eyed each other gravely, and were mutually pleased.

"We're having turkey," Ranald stated.

"No! By crickey, I *thought* that smelled like turkey! Can you sit next me at the table?"

"I'm not to be at the table. This is a very stylish dinner."

"It was to be," Meggy put in with a faint giggle.

"But we're saved, Ranald my boy! Good old Anna just fixed things right for you and me. May he sit beside me, Mrs. MacTay?"

"I guess he'll have to eat with us," Meggy answered. "I won't have time to give him his supper here."

By now she had forgotten the feeling of panic. Her heart had stopped its furious drumming. She felt suddenly and happily at ease with the whole situation.

"I'll lift the soup now," she said, "and then we'll be ready. I only hope it's all right."

"Aw, Mother, do we have to eat soup before the turkey?" Rana!d inquired plaintively.

"That's what I say, Mrs. MacTay. Wouldn't it save you a lot of trouble if we dispensed with it? I'm on Rana!d's side myself, absolutely. I want to get right at the fowl."

Meggy hesitated. "It would be ever so much easier," she said. "But I don't like to— Alex wanted everything to be just right."

"I'll fix that," Jack said quickly. "You watch me!"

He went back to the parlor door and eyed the two men there with severity.

"The management wishes to state," he said, "that they don't serve soup with a turkey dinner. If anybody asks for it—chucko! Out he goes! . . . Did I hear you say anything, MacTay? One word from you, sir, and you'll eat in the kitchen!"

From that moment on, it turned into an utterly hilarious dinner. Jack himself carried in the big turkey on its platter, calling lustily for bagpipes as he did so. McKelvey's native wit rose to its highest flower. Rana!d, in a transport of glee, sat between Jack and McKelvey, his silver consisting of a miscellany of kitchen equipment he had collected for himself, which, if Anna could have seen it, would have sent her temperature up several degrees. Alex finally relaxed into a state of comfortable enjoyment, while Meggy laughed and chatted as naturally as though Jack were as familiar a guest as Uncle Andy.

It was late when they finally left the table. Even then Meggy had to be firm about the dishes, for Jack insisted that he knew a special trick to make the knives and forks dance together in the dishpan! They went back to the parlor, and Rana!d reluctantly said good night.

Jack held the boy's hand.

"How are you fixed for uncles, old top? Got a good supply?"

"Not in this country," Ranald answered seriously. "Just Uncle Andy here."

"Well, he's worth several. But you can't have too many you know at birthdays and Christmases and times like that. Could you use another, do you think?"

The child looked inquiringly at his mother.

"I think he would love to have the one you mean," she said.

"Make it Uncle Jack then, Ranald. I need a nephew worse than anything."

The boy's voice came back joyously from the top of the stairs.

"Good-bye, Uncle Jack. Come back soon."

When Jack made his own adieus at last, his face was suddenly touched with feeling.

"I can't tell you how much this evening has meant to me, Mrs. MacTay. It's been my happiest in years."

"We've enjoyed it, too. So much! You'll come back, won't you?"

"On Anna's day out? I meant what I said about kitchens."

"You should taste Meggy's ham-and-egg suppers," McKelvey put in. "I like to sneak in myself for one of them."

"May I, too? Some time?"

Meggy flushed and smiled. "All that distance for ham and eggs?"

"Even for a crust, dear lady." Then he made his voice very gay. "Even for a crust," he laughed, and they all joined him.

But as he lay in his berth later, while the train climbed the mountains, Jack was not laughing. His thin, sensitive lips were drawn in lines of a weariness not of the body.

"A crust," he said slowly in the darkness. "That's all there'll ever be for me."

While the dinner party had been far different from all their careful planning, even Alex felt that it had been a success, and a pride ran through him that a man of Jack White's standing should be on intimate terms in his house. It had not yet dawned

upon him that it might be a greater social compliment to have Jack sitting at ease astride the kitchen stool than to have him as a formal guest at a reception such as the Rockwells' had been, but he was content for the present. His heart, indeed, was very light these days. Meggy was like herself again (though sometimes still he woke in the dead of night to find her weeping). In his eagerness to use more of his new surplus for her pleasure, he bought a horse and trap for her birthday. Meggy was delighted, for the horse looked like Beauty. Now she could drive out to the farm whenever she chose. Alex insisted, too, that they needed a man to look after the horses. The stable at the back of the lot was really a good-sized carriage house as well, with rooms above it for a coachman.

When Anna volunteered that she had a brother, a good groom, who would like a place, the matter was arranged and John, large, blond and immensely respectful, was at last installed. While Meggy had been startled by Alex's suggestion in the first place, she found John's presence on the place highly satisfactory. He had a good knowledge of gardening too, and as spring came on he did all the work about the yard which Alex no longer had time for.

The changes in the MacTay ménage were not unnoted by the neighborhood. When John brought the smart trap to the front door and Meggy, in her linen suit and wide sailor, stepped in from the stone "upping block" and took the lines herself, there were many eyes to see. A number of women who had been merely names before, began to take form in Meggy's life, and the postman frequently left a square envelope now along with the usual oblong ones. These invitations were still not from those of the inner circle, but they represented a degree of recognition which Meggy accepted with pleasure.

As a matter of fact there was in the very air at this time a robust sense of security, a gay optimism, a rather daring and intrepid confidence in the future. For this was a period of expan-

sion, of wide extension of credit, of business booming and, indeed, overreaching itself. From the offices of great corporations where captains of industry sat as upon stable thrones, down to the parlors and drawing rooms where hostesses served tea and staged their social triumphs, everything was done with a lavish hand. "Good Times" was written in capitals across the country.

Occasionally, however, as Alex talked with Colonel Selden, that astute old gentleman interposed a warning. He did not entirely trust this period of turgescence. He shook his head over the venturous quality of business, and the dangers of overgrowth.

"Keep your head on your shoulders, Alex," he cautioned. "I don't like the fat years to look too fat. I've seen the results before. What are you doing just now?"

"I'm makin' money," Alex said, smiling. "I've got a plan in my head, but I'm waitin' a little to think it over."

The Colonel nodded, pursuing his own train of thought. "The business genius," he said, "is the man who knows when to risk his shirt, and when to sit tight and watch the other fellow lose his. Just now, my advice would be to sit tight."

"I had the same feelin'."

"Well, follow your instinct, and I guess you won't go far wrong."

The plan of which Alex spoke had to do with a small square farm lying some miles north of Greensburg. It was hilly, its fence corners ragged, and its fields in no very high state of cultivation. Agriculturally speaking, it was a negligible piece of property, but a chance remark of Gilly's once had led Alex to inspect it carefully. Along with his surveyor he had driven one day for miles over the surrounding countryside. They had made a map which ever since Alex had carried in the pocket of his vest, not even trusting it to a lockbox. With the vision of greater expansion of his own workings ever in his mind, he had been at

pains to study the lay of the coal all through that section. But here, unexpectedly in the acreage of this small untidy farm, he had stumbled upon his enemy's vulnerable spot.

The situation when he had all the information together was this: Rockwell's holdings were roughly in the shape of an opened shears, the right blade being enormously the wider. This section held the long entries and the rooms now being worked in the Rockwell mine. But the left blade consisted of a large farm next the handle and one at the tip which Rockwell owned and a square farm between the two which he did not own. It was this square which was marked in red on the map in Alex's vest pocket. More than this, Alex discovered that the coal land lying between the blades of the shears had not been bought as yet by Rockwell, and he thought he knew why Rockwell felt safe. For the present he had plenty of coal in his right-hand strip. No other operator was near enough to be able to use the coal in the unbought land and thus threaten his secure position. He would wait until he needed the additional land before buying.

In the matter of the square key farm, Alex soon had all the facts. It was owned by an Irishman named Kenney, who had stubbornly set his price at thirty thousand dollars. His lawyer, Hollister of Greensburg, approached Rockwell at intervals to negotiate a sale. Rockwell with his customary assurance laughed him off. He was not ready to buy. Let Kenney whistle till he was, and meanwhile get his price down. Alex felt convinced that just then Rockwell was short of ready cash and, having no immediate need to close the deal, would try to hold out as long as possible to squeeze Kenney from his set price.

For months Alex had possessed this information and kept his own counsel. He knew he could not use the coal himself. The buying of the key farm—if he bought it—would be solely to block Rockwell. In the years to come, when the coal in the right blade was worked out and he, Alex, owned the key square on the left—oh, there was a situation in which to see your enemy

placed! But was it worth thirty thousand dollars? In the nature of the case he could ask no advice of anyone—McKelvey's least of all, for he knew already what his opinion would be.

In the end, however, it was McKelvey who inadvertently settled the matter.

"Well, Meggy," he remarked one Saturday when he was having lunch with them, "I suppose you're going to the big gab fest at Sally Rockwell's next week. What do you suppose it will be like, Alex, to hear a hundred women all talking at once?"

Alex did not answer; he only looked across at Meggy, who said nothing.

"Did you get a bid to this thing?" he asked.

Meggy hesitated, her cheeks flushing.

"No, I didn't. You see, I don't really know her well— You see, it's—"

McKelvey, amazed and distressed, interrupted.

"Why, Meggy, I'm sorry I spoke. I just heard some people talking about it, and I supposed of course— Why, I thought you and Sally had gotten to be real friendly!"

"We have talked a few times on the street but not for a long while now. I wish we were friends. I like her, and this is one thing I'd like to have gone to. It's a garden party. But you see she doesn't really— I mean, it's only—"

Meggy floundered hopelessly before Alex's straight look.

"So she's invited a hundred women, has she, an' left you out! Every woman that's anybody in the whole town except you. Is that it?" he said sharply.

"But," Meggy urged, "there's no reason she should ask me when you come to think of it. I've never invited her here."

"No, an' you never will! I'll never have a Rockwell under my roof, you can be sure of that. But I'll tell you one thing. They'll not always hold their heads as high as they do the now! I may fecht away a long while, but I'll bring them down at the last!"

"Alex, please! It's nothing! What does the tea matter? Uncle Andy, would you like to drive out to the farm with us this after-

noon? Granny isn't very well, and she always loves to see you. We'll take the carriage."

She talked on about the plan, forestalling further comment from Alex. At the end of the meal, however, he rose abruptly.

"I'll be leavin' you," he said. "I've a little business to see to."

"But I thought you were coming along, Alex?" Meggy spoke in surprise.

"I can't," he said. "Something's come up I must attend to at the office. The rest of you go on an' make a day of it. It's nice weather, an' the roads are smoothed out."

Meggy followed him into the hall with an anxious face.

"Don't look like that, Alex. You frighten me. I'm always afraid you'll do something we'll—regret. Promise me you'll not think any more about the Rockwells or do anything against them. Please promise."

The heavy portieres screened them from McKelvey, who was finishing his stogie at the dining-room table. Alex gave her a long kiss.

"If anybody slights you, they'll have me to reckon with! Now you go along, an' let me run my business in my own way."

She knew there was no use of further words: but as she and Ranald and McKelvey drove to the farm and made their visit, an undercurrent of fear kept troubling her mind. What was Alex doing now? What sudden plan had seized him? She reproached herself for her inability to carry off the scene at the dining-room table with more ease. The truth was, she had been genuinely disappointed and hurt at not being invited to the garden party. Of all the women in the social group, she would have preferred Sally for a friend. Her natural pride of birth, her assured grace, her independence, her quick wit—all these attracted Meggy because they were foreign to herself, even as Sally's dark vividness was the opposite of Meggy's own golden beauty. But while they had met in spirit over the child's illness and death, there had been new barriers since then. Alex did not realize that the slight was not directed so much at her as at the MacTay

interests, Meggy thought forlornly. "But I'll never tell him that he's brought it on himself."

When Alex left the house his mind was definitely made up. Though he would doubtless have reached the same decision without it, the present rancor precipitated his action. He went to Hollister's office, waited until the lawyer was alone, and then proceeded to the point as usual.

"You're representin' this man Kenney, out north here a ways, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"I want to buy his farm."

Hollister brought his chair down on its four legs with a clatter.

"Why, that coal's no good to you!"

"That's my business. What's he askin'?"

"Thirty thousand."

"I'll pay twenty-eight."

"Can't be done."

"Oh, yes. You put this sale through for twenty-eight, an' there'll be a hundred-dollar bill for your own pocket. An' keep my name out of it as much as possible. Do you want to think it over?" Alex stood up, ready to leave.

"Well," Hollister hesitated, "of course I might go out and talk to Kenney and see what he's willing to do. I never reckoned anybody'd ever want that coal but Rockwell, and he's bound he won't take it till he gets ready; and then he says he won't pay over twenty-five. I've always advised Kenney to hold out."

Alex smiled. "I guess he'll do what you tell him. I'll pay twenty-eight, cash, an' I'm ready to buy now. When'll I hear from you?"

"I'll take a run out now," the lawyer said with an air of suppressed excitement, "and I'll let you know Monday morning." He followed Alex to the door.

"Would you mind telling me what you're going to do with that coal land?"

Alex eyed him in all seriousness.

"I don't know yet," he said.

The first of the week Hollister reported with a slight shifting of the eye that Kenney had agreed to sell for twenty-eight thousand. Alex laid a hundred-dollar bill on the table with the peculiar ethical reaction of a man who will buy his way anywhere but scorns the one who is bought. Hollister pocketed the bill absently and went on talking about the deed.

When Alex went to Pittsburgh to discuss the financing with Colonel Selden, the old gentleman at once suggested floating a loan.

"I can sell bonds for that amount around Greensburg easily," he said. "That will save your ready cash. You feel this land is going to be valuable to you?"

"I want it bad," Alex said.

"Well," said the Colonel, "I trust your judgment in matters of this kind; but, as I told you before, don't go into anything too deep just now. I don't like the looks of things. We've just had the old cycle: depression, 1903; returning prosperity, 1904; a boom in 1905; all production records broken in 1906! There you are. Same old story. Only look out for what comes next."

"This is all I have in mind the now," Alex replied.

"Good! We'll fix you up on the loan. I'm proud of your success, Alex. If the business men were all like you, bankers wouldn't get gray-headed."

Not until the transaction was finally completed did Alex go to McKelvey and then it was with the deed to the farm in his pocket. His face was flushed as though from drink as he told his story in quick sharp sentences, walking about in the stress of his excitement.

"Haven't I been all but prayin' for a chance like this? I'd have broke Rockwell if it took me my lifetime, but now I've got him blocked! It'll just be a matter of years till he'll have to come to me for that coal. An' when he comes—I'll tell him to go to hell."

McKelvey was silent with a feeling of shock. He watched the

hard hate on Alex's face, and his own heart was struck by it more than by the news itself, for he loved the young man as a son.

"Can't you live and let live, Alex?" he asked quietly. "You can't use that coal. Why did you buy it just on the chance of its some day thwarting another man who's never really harmed you?"

"Aye, but it's bound to thwart him," Alex returned, ignoring the rest of McKelvey's question. "Look you here!"

He drew from his vest pocket the map he had made months ago. He spread it out on the desk with its open-shears diagram.

"Look you!" he said, pointing to the red-outlined square. "There's what I bought. You can see what it'll do some day to Rockwell."

When McKelvey did not speak, Alex looked at him with irritation.

"Well, what are you so soft about him all at once for? You don't like him so well yourself!"

"I don't dislike him," McKelvey said; "and I am fond of Sally as I was of her father before her. I was well enough pleased when you got ahead of Rockwell on contracts. That's legitimate rivalry. But this deal is different. This is hard business, Alex. This looks to me like the beginning of the end for Rockwell and his whole family—" He broke off, rumpling his hair; then, "*Respite finem*," he quoted slowly.

"What's that?" Alex asked.

McKelvey smiled wryly.

"That's an old proverb that was quoted once by a wiser man than I am to a richer man than you are. Solon said it to Croesus. It means, 'Remember the end.' Sometimes, Alex, I believe you ought to think about that. It gives perspective, you know, to what you do along the way."

"Ach," Alex said shortly, "I don't know what you're drivin' at."

McKelvey leaned forward, his spare shoulders hunched over

his desk. For all his lonely asceticism he had watched with a finely perceptive understanding the relations between Alex and his wife and son.

"I think you do know," he said very low. "And I'm sure Meggy does."

There was an awkward silence in which the shadow of a fear drifted across Alex's face and was gone. He picked up his map.

"Well," he said with a certain sharp briskness of tone, "I must be gettin' on. I guess I'll not need this any more now."

He started to tear the paper across. As he did so the pattern he had drawn upon it seemed by some irresistible force to catch his eye. His hands stopped in their movement. What he saw now as though it were outlined in fire was the land lying between the blades of the shears, the long stretch of coal land there that Rockwell had not yet bought. Alex saw his own suddenly acquired possession as the gateway into this new dream! He pieced the torn paper together.

"Mebbe I'd better be keepin' it after all," he said, and went out.

When he was gone, as usual the office felt empty. The power of the man always seemed to fill the room in which he was. McKelvey sat still, his head resting on his hands, making no move to take up his work where he had been interrupted. The look on Alex's face as he studied the torn paper as though he were seeing it for the first time, had not escaped McKelvey. He thought now of that first morning when the young Scotchman had stood before his desk and he had judged him to be a "lad o' pairts" and sent him to the Parkinson farm to open a coal bank. What strange threads had been set to weaving on that day! How unpredictable the final pattern! He thought of Meggy and all that life had brought her; he thought of the Rockwells and felt like a dubious god who had started tremendous and moving forces and then come to question the wisdom of them.

"But I can't take all the responsibility for things," McKelvey thought at last. "Alex would have gone ahead somehow without

me. It's in him. '*Data fata secutus.*' He's following the fate assigned him, and there's no use trying to stop him now."

Meggy had returned from her recent afternoon at the farm with an anxious mind in regard to her grandmother's condition. While for many years the old lady had been compelled to use a cane and spend most of the time in her chair, she had been possessed of an apparently ageless soundness of body. Her frame was, as she herself described it, "only a rickle of bones," with the withered skin stretched tightly over it; but the old heart beat on with a steady valiance, and her vigorous interest in life continued unabated. Suddenly, however, in the late spring she grew weak; her cane slipped on the floor; her hands groped for more support. By midsummer she could not rise from her bed. They had the telephone now from the farm to Greensburg, but even with daily news Meggy was restless and worried.

"I would like to go out and stay for a while, Alex, if you wouldn't mind. I'll take Ranald with me. Mother says Granny keeps asking for me. You'll be all right?"

"As right as I ever am without you. But go along—you'll feel better to be there. I'll come out on the Saturday. How are they fixed for money just now? There'll be the doctor to pay, an' extras. You'd better take some with you."

He opened his pocketbook and handed her a bill. At sight of its denomination Meggy impulsively threw her arms about him. Her outburst of joy and affection was as intense as it was rare. When at last she tried to draw away, laughing, she saw that Alex was deeply moved. He still held her in his arms where she had impetuously thrown herself, and his eyes were searching her own.

"What made you do that?" he asked.

"Why," Meggy stammered, "I don't know. It just pleased me that you thought of the folks, and that I would have this extra money for Granny and all of them— Didn't you like me to do it?" she ended mischievously.

But Alex passed the lightness by. His face was grave.

"It's been a long time," he said, and then stopped abruptly.

Without warning, in this strange and unforeseen moment, the truth had made itself felt. The look on her face, her impulsive gesture, had caused the indiscernible buried stream of their life to rise for an instant to the surface. Even between them who were one flesh there was a deep, unregarded mystery that now, on the call of a word, stood revealed. He saw, and she was powerless to prevent his seeing, that the spontaneous joyousness of her nature had been quenched by the years; that somehow there had been lacking that deep stimulus of unfettered happiness which would have made such a response as this that so stirred him, frequent instead of rare. Meggy saw Alex groping with the significance of this, as she herself was doing. Was it because of the link with the old life that she had received this particular gift from Alex with such joy? Was he seeing what she had long known to be the truth, that aside from securing the comfort of those she loved the deep desires of her heart were unpurchasable with money? There was on his face now a strange look, for him, of frustration, of defeat.

In a few moments the mood had passed and they were talking together as before; but as she made her preparations to go Meggy saw Alex's eyes following her, still baffled. His good-bye was that of a lover. She wanted to cry out to him, "All you are thinking is true, and yet I love you"; but she only clung to him, saying practical things about the house, about Anna and Uncle Andy.

"I'll be out on the Saturday," he repeated as he put them into the trap; and as they turned the corner, Ranald, looking over his shoulder, said in surprise, "Father's still watching us."

Once at the farm, Meggy's mind held nothing but the immediate anxiety. The old lady lay weakly in bed, her long emaciated fingers plucking at the quilt. Her eyes peered sharply about as usual, and her mind was clear; but it was evident that the silver cord would soon break. Meggy stayed on from week to week, for the old lady was restless when she was away from her bed-

side. She watched anxiously for the doctor's frequent visits, always calling Meggy back from her last low conversation with him at the door to ask nervously, "What did he say about me?"

She tried to sit up and even to get out of bed, to "try her strength." Some times she spoke hopefully of the time when she would be downstairs again; at others she would say with sadness, "I doubt I'll never be any better." At all times there was apparent her intense desire to live.

Meggy, lying wakeful at night, suffered from this pain. Granny's thin, clawlike fingers clutching desperately at life seemed tragic. Why could not old age fall peacefully to sleep? Why could the long ripened fruit not drop with an imperceptible severance from the tree? She had supposed in Granny's case there would be a gentle relinquishment, a complete resignation to the end. Through the years she had talked calmly, familiarly enough of death. In fact Meggy had often marveled at her easy, almost complacent acceptance of the passing of old friends and relatives. At such news Granny would demand the details; then, when they had all been given her, she would smooth her apron, settle her cap, and state with an air of comfortable finality, "Ah, well, they're laid away now!"

But in her own case it was different, and the old anxious, questioning eyes haunted Meggy. But she brightly kept up the pretense: Granny was better. See how pert she looked in her new bed jacket! Watch how her appetite would improve with all these nice things to eat! By the time she finished her new tonic she would be so frisky there would be no holding her!

But a sultry week came on, and the thin fingers ceased plaiting and folding the quilt. A delicate misty veil seemed to shut out the familiar world from the peering old eyes. Granny lay quiet now, except for her labored breathing.

Toward evening of the hottest day the sky grew overcast, and the smell of a storm came through the windows. Meggy was leaning over the bed, fanning its transient occupant. The old lady had barely spoken all day, her few words showing that her

mind wandered. Suddenly, with effort, her lips moved in a hoarse whisper.

"What—kind—of a man did—you get anyhow, Meggy?"

Meggy smothered a sob.

"He's—he's wonderful, Granny."

The old lady never spoke again. A quiet breath took the place of the labored one. At the change, Meggy called her mother. Bill stayed below with Ranald, and so the two women stood alone watching that soft, quick flutter of the thin skin in the cheeks. While the storm she always dreaded broke, while lightning tore the sky and the sound of the thunder and the crashing of the tree branches seemed to rock the house, the soft breathing diminished to an irregular wisp as though a candle guttered. At midnight it ceased entirely, with the storm.

Alex came out the next day, and Meggy found herself following him about, clinging to him when they were alone. The fact of death stood out more sharply before her now than in the swift passing of little Tirzah, and Alex's vigorous presence seemed to give the lie to this ultimate destiny.

Bill's attitude was strangest of all. He wandered about nervously, slinking often into the remote stillness of the big parlor when he thought no one was looking. Once when Meggy saw him closing the door softly behind him he blew his nose and began with a queerly apologetic tone to explain.

"Her an' me never got along; but you can't fight with anybody for thirty-five years an' not miss them when they're gone. I'd got a new one out of the Bible to stump her on, too. I didn't want to upset her when she was down sick, but as soon as she was able I was all ready for her. 'Who was the Caph-torims?' I was goin' to ask her. . . . Well, it's no good now."

When the sad three days were over, Alex and Meggy left Ranald to keep Tirzah and Bill company at the farm and drove home themselves over the familiar road. They were both silent until the cool woods took them in. Then Meggy spoke.

"Alex, do you ever think about—the end?"

"What makes you say that? Was McKelvey talkin' to ye?"

"Why, no!" Meggy said wonderingly. "It's because I've been so close to it. When you watch someone die, someone you love, you can't help wondering when it will come to you."

"You must get a thought like that out of your head. It's not good for you."

"But don't you ever think of it?"

"Never!" he said almost roughly. "I'm too busy livin' my life. Besides, we're young yet. Why should we be fashin' ourselves now with thoughts of death?"

"It has touched us already." Meggy sighed. After a moment she went on. "I felt something strange as I watched with Granny those last days. She had been so restless, so pitifully anxious to get better. Then all at once she got quiet and just lay looking off at nothing we could see. As if she'd caught a glimpse of something and was content then to go."

Meggy glanced at Alex's strong face beside her. Would he at all understand what she was trying to tell him? Or would he brush the thought quickly aside, irritated by it?

"It made me think of a verse from a poem we learned once in school, about the River of Time. I committed it then because I had to, but the other night it came back with a rush to my mind just when Granny was dying. I think I know now what it means:

"And the width of the waters, the hush
As it draws to the Ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of man on its breast—
As the pale waste widens around him,
As the banks fade dimmer away,
As the stars come out, and the night-wind
Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea."

She was startled at the effect on Alex. He pulled the horse sharply up by the side of the road and stopped in the shade of the woods.

"Say that again, Meggy, will you?" he asked—hungrily, it seemed to her.

She repeated it slowly, still surprised that he should be interested. When she had finished, he sat for some minutes in silence as though straining to hear the words again in his mind. At last he drew a long breath, tightened the reins and started the horse.

"Aye," he said, with a wistfulness in his voice. "Whoever wrote that knew just the way it ought to be put." Then he spoke no more all the way home. Meggy, sitting quietly beside him, mused, "It must be because he loves the sea."

CHAPTER IX

WITH the coming on of the fall of 1907, strange rumblings of an approaching economic storm began to be heard in banking circles. Colonel Selden shook his head darkly to Alex on his visits there and hinted that he knew more than he was saying about the dangers to come. But to the average citizen the "panic" broke like a clap of thunder. On the 22nd of October the Knickerbocker Trust Company of New York closed its doors after a sensational run, sweeping a dozen stock firms with it. On the same day five grave men, one of them the Secretary of the United States Treasury, one of them the country's greatest banker, met in tense session in New York to attempt the salvation of the Trust Company of America, about which rumors were already flying. This company, perfectly solvent under normal conditions, was like most banks, unable to endure a prolonged run. If it failed the whole banking system of the country would suffer.

Quietly, tensely, the five grave men laid their plans to come to the support of the Trust Company. All, they hoped, would yet be well.

But they reckoned without the Argus eyes of the reporters. The next morning from one end of the country to the other, the newspapers carried the word that the Trust Company of America was in need of assistance. By the time the bank opened its doors, a frantic mob waited outside. There ensued then one of the most dramatic engagements in economic history. For days streams of terrified depositors pressed the tellers' windows and were paid their deposits promptly and in full while another

stream of millions of dollars flowed in from the central banking office of the city to meet the emergency. The Trust Company of America was saved; but in spite of this the panic had broken bounds. Before another month it had touched every city and hamlet of the country.

Colonel Selden looked old and drawn when he talked the matter over with Alex in late November.

"We're all right here so far if something else doesn't blow up. But I wish the next six months were over! It's hell, I tell you. Companies are failing right and left. Men come in here to my office and cry like children. One of my best friends shot himself yesterday—" The Colonel winked hard and then became again his controlled self. Alex admired his strength. He looked like the grim old soldier he was, unsure how the battle would go, but carrying himself bravely, sticking to his post.

"Watch what you do, Alex. Don't give me any more worries. How are you meeting your pay roll?"

"Scrip," Alex answered. "It's all anybody can get now."

"Right," said the Colonel. "Your men satisfied?"

"They have to be."

By January the whole country was racked with distress. While the actual panic was over, the great depression that followed it gripped the land. Money seemed to have disappeared as though it had never existed; rich men had become poor overnight; once busy men walked the streets in idleness. Firm after firm, company after company sank in ruin. Desperation was in the air.

For some time Alex had noted with uneasiness that the orders from Pittsburgh Iron & Steel were diminishing steadily. He was not too much surprised, therefore, to receive a telephone call from David Blair one day asking if he might come out to the Greensburg office. When he arrived Alex was shocked at the change in him. From a robust forty-five he had become a haggard sixty.

"MacTay," he said when the greetings were over, "in my

years of dealing with you I've always found that you go straight to the point. I'm going to do that now and I trust you to respect the confidence. Our company's in bad shape, and if we don't get new capital soon we're sunk."

Alex stared at him. In all his concern over the dwindling orders he had never suspected anything like this. *Pittsburgh Iron & Steel!* He had supposed it at least was stable as the Allegheny Mountains themselves.

David Blair continued.

"We can't get a cent from the banks, of course. I've tried a dozen men I know, and they're all in too tight a place with their own business to do anything for us. Yesterday I thought of you. I know you've made money these last years. There are many ways that a connection with a steel firm such as ours would work to your advantage. . . . We are ready to make certain concessions if you could see your way clear to furnish us with capital."

Alex shoved his hands into his pockets and leaned back in his chair. And said nothing.

Mr. Blair went on nervously.

"In return for this there could be an agreement by which we would use more of your product, for instance."

"What about stock?"

Blair nodded gravely. "You would receive stock for your investment, of course."

"How much money are you needin'?"

Blair named the figure.

For a long time there was silence. Alex, with his intense power of concentration, was as withdrawn in his own calculations as though he were alone in the room. The other man waited.

At last Alex leaned forward.

"Mr. Blair," he said, "I'll furnish that much capital on two conditions. I want 40 per cent of the stock, and I want an indefinite contract to supply all your coke."

Blair jumped to his feet. "My God, man, you don't know what you're talking about! Forty per cent would give you potential control!"

"I know it," Alex said calmly. "I mind you told me that once."

"But this is preposterous! It's dishonorable! I've been utterly frank with you. Told you the state we're in. Now you deliberately take advantage of it."

"Why wouldn't I?" Alex asked shortly. "If I do this for you I'll be riskin' everything I have. Would I do that unless I'm goin' to come out ahead in the long run?"

"But even 20 per cent of the stock is more than it's worth!"

"That depends on how bad you need the money."

"You're a hard man, MacTay."

"If you can get your money elsewhere, all right. If you want it from me, them's my terms."

He followed Blair to the door, feeling no pity for the man's trembling hands.

"If you go on with this," he added, "I'll see you don't regret it. We can make money together later on, I'm thinkin'."

David Blair went down the stairs without answering.

But Alex came back to his desk, shaken himself now with the tremendous possibility before him. It was so sudden, so fraught with desperate risk and with the chance of ultimate and enormous gain that he felt himself inflamed with the excitement of it. To possess a practically controlling interest in the Pittsburgh company would mean his entry into the world of steel, that world whose master, Andrew Carnegie, had for many years now been his idol. It would mean too, that with this almost boundless market for coke opened to him he could work more and more coal lands. It would mean . . .

As vividly, as overpoweringly as the vision had come to him in McKelvey's office when he started to tear the map, Alex saw now a definite and compulsive need of acquiring the gore of land lying between the opened shears of Rockwell's holdings.

He picked up his hat and started out. He must have room to breathe in thoughts of this amplitude. As he strode along the street he saw himself one day going east on steel business and meeting Andrew Carnegie, himself!

"Ah, MacTay, you hail from the right end of the world by the name. Where were you born?" he might say.

"Near Berwick, Mr. Carnegie."

"Fine. I'm Dumfermline, myself."

But they would not talk about Scotland; they would talk of coal and coke and steel. He would look into the eyes of the little giant, and hear the voice of the man that had made and ruled an industry!

Then, as though swooping down from the heights, his thoughts centered on the new land purchase and upon Rockwell's final and complete defeat. It was all clear before him. For David Blair would return. He would accept the demands. With his peculiar business clairvoyance Alex had recognized the signs of his yielding to the terms even as he violently denounced them. There would be then the visit to Colonel Selden who, while he had cautioned against risk just now, would surely be impressed with the overwhelming greatness of this opportunity.

As he neared his own house he saw two children walking slowly ahead of him. One was Ranald, a tall boy now of twelve; the other was a girl with dark brown pigtails. Their heads were close together while they examined a book as they walked. Alex caught a glimpse once of the little girl's bright, vivid face. He did not recognize her.

At the MacTay gate, Ranald turned in.

"Good-bye, Cyncie," he called teasingly.

"Don't call me that!" the girl flared.

"Cyncie, Cyncie
Stole a pin-syl!"

Ranald chanted,

"You're mean, Ranald MacTay!"

"Cyncie, Cyncie,
Ate a quince-y!"

"I hate you!"

"Cyncie, Cyncie,
Walks so mince-y!"

This time the girl did not answer. She only made a quick dab at her eyes and went on. In a flash Alex saw the boy's expression change. He sped after the girl.

"Do you really mind?" he asked gently.

She nodded.

"Then I won't any more. Honest. I didn't know you *really*—"

The girl-child looked up at the boy, and Alex saw the young, lovely look that passed between them.

"It's just because words always seem to make rhymes in my head," the boy explained. "But I won't say it any more. Honest, Cynthia."

A pang shot through Alex's heart. He saw himself at Ranald's age at his grandfather's on the Galloway moors or wandering through Tibbie's Glen, his head high to catch the smell of the winds, his rhymes flowing ceaselessly through his mind. He felt an old hunger which he had thought would not rise again.

When he met the boy at the gate his voice in spite of himself sounded harsh.

"What are you doin', teasin' the little girl?"

Ranald hesitated, taken aback by the fact his father had overheard. Then he answered respectfully but with a finality of reserve that did not miss Alex's ear, "I've made it all right with her, so it's really nobody else's business now."

Alex looked sharply at his son as though seeing him for the first time.

"I doubt he's got the MacTay will," he thought to himself. "I'll have to be lookin' out for that as he gets older."

He meant to ask Meggy later who the girl was, but in the weight of more pressing thoughts it escaped him.

In regard to his present great crisis Alex had been correct in one thing. In two days, David Blair accepted his terms in the name of Pittsburgh's board of directors. But the second assumption had been wrong. When he went to tell Colonel Selden the news with a fine air of pride and importance, the old banker stared at him incredulously and then, to Alex's horror, shook his head with violence.

"Can't be done, Alex! Absolutely not. I'm surprised a man of your judgment would even consider it. It would be sheer lunacy. No, no! You let Pittsburgh Iron & Steel fight its own battles, and you go on sitting tight till things straighten out again."

Alex eyed him steadily.

"But I'm not askin' your advice, Colonel. I'm wantin' to arrange a loan, an' I've got the collateral to put up for it."

The Colonel's shrewd old eyes were really anxious then. He began talking earnestly, patiently, as a father to a son.

"You don't realize what you're doing, Alex. I know the state of the market. This depression may last a year. Your steel plant's dependent on your railroads, and the railroads aren't going to buy. To raise this loan you'd have to put up every security you own. And I'm warning you that as sure as death you'll lose them! Now forget this whole scheme. I'm an old man, and I know something about business. Take my advice. I'm sorry for Pittsburgh. I'm sorry for David Blair. But I won't see you sacrificed. They'll lose anyway in the long run and sink you with them. It's too big a risk, Alex. Forget it."

Alex was pale, but his chin was set.

"A man's got to take chances," he said, "an' I'm prepared to take this one. I'm askin' you for the loan."

For a long hour the Colonel fought on. But he saw at last that it was a losing fight. The man before him, set and resolute, was bent by no argument he could offer. He merely stopped the banker once to state that he was going to buy a gore of coal land that lay between Rockwell's holdings.

"When I'm supplyin' Pittsburgh with all its coke I'll need more land, more ovens. I've got to have about forty thousand dollars more than the Pittsburgh capital. You can make the one loan cover both transactions."

"You're a blind, obstinate fool, Alex. I'm warning you!"

It was of no avail.

"Does your wife know what you're doing?"

"No."

"Is this fair to her?"

The mask of reserve which the Colonel had seen on Alex's face before, fell upon it now.

"I have to go the way my own judgment's pullin' me," he said shortly.

The Colonel threw up his hands. "Well, it's on your own head then, Alex. I'll give you the loan for one year if you've enough collateral. But in all my experience of banking I've never hated to do anything as I do this. I've watched your success. I've been proud of you. I thought you were one man I could trust never to lose his head. . . . Well, if it has to be done, let's get it over with."

When Alex left the office he had mortgaged everything he owned in the world, including his home.

"It's a chance I've got to be takin'," he said grimly, meeting the Colonel's accusing eyes as the brick house was written into the instrument. The capital for Pittsburgh Iron & Steel would be in their hands the next day; the remainder was credited to his account.

The months which followed were the strangest Alex had ever known, stranger far than those perilous days in which the Magnus had hung in the balance. There was first of all his sense of new responsibility. He went to Pittsburgh now three days a week to sit in the councils of the company; he stayed up again far into the nights studying the problems of steel. He knew hours of elation greater than he had yet experienced when he saw the future unfolding according to his plan. For he had at this point

every confidence that the year's volume of business would more than enable him to meet his loan when it fell due.

He had decided to make use of the lawyer Hollister again in the purchase of the new coal land. It was a most opportune time to buy, for the farmers, too, were feeling the pinch of the hard times and ready cash looked to them like golden apples on the bough. Hollister had a suggestion which Alex fell in with at once. It was to purchase only the "profit a prendre" rights to mine the coal without buying the land above it. This would save Alex some money and also get around the difficulty of one owner who did not want to give up his farm. Though deep in his heart Alex suspected that the quality of the lawyer's dealings was not always above reproach, he thrust aside any qualms. The responsibility was on Hollister. Let him look to his own ethics. It was enough for Alex that by spring he owned the coal, and so far as he knew Rockwell was not yet aware of it.

He had confided in no one, not even McKelvey, the full extent of his latest project though they all knew he had an interest now in the Pittsburgh. As a matter of fact, McKelvey looked his full seventy-five years at the moment. He had lost heavily during the crash. His soberly selected, conservative bonds were, most of them, worthless. A faint criticism even of his hero, Theodore Roosevelt, crept occasionally into his conversation.

"Whenever the government interferes with private incomes there's always trouble. I've watched it! This panic can be traced right back to the passage of the Sixteenth Amendment about the Federal Income Tax. Yes, sir. I said at the time that it was a mistake. When a man knows the government can reach into his pocket and take out an unlimited amount he's going to get fidgety. Wall Street's going to get fidgety. The panic of '93 was another example of the same thing. There was fooling with the people's money going on then."

He came often to sit awhile with Meggy for general consolation and listen to the latest reports of Ranald's progress.

"I don't know what all Alex is up to now," he said once a

little wistfully. "He don't talk things over with me like he used to. I guess I'm getting old. The old joints are beginning to creak. Well, just so I don't begin to die at the top, that's all I ask."

Meggy comforted him, assuring him that Alex would soon be through all this panic trouble and would then be visiting with him as usual.

As the summer came on, however, she saw that instead of this, an old enemy was advancing upon them. The stress, the strain, the tension that had once before held them all in its grip was again present. When she questioned Alex he told her only that the depression was not lifting, that orders were falling off daily both at the mines and at the steel mill, that he had a great deal of money tied up, and that he couldn't tell yet how things were coming out. Once again he was driving himself relentlessly, "takin' it out of his own body," as Pat warned him. But in these months he knew a futility of effort which he had not felt before. There were widespread powers at work against him now. The business of a whole country was panting feebly for breath, and all his own interests were bound up with it. He thought of the cave-in at the Magnus and how then he could put his great shoulders and arms to work to arrest the danger of failure. There was relief in that, a definite sense of overcoming, of wrestling with physical obstacles. Now the forces against him were subtle, diffused, imponderable. Here were three great plants, the Scotia, the Magnus, and the Pittsburgh one, ready to function perfectly. But the motive power, that vast, interrelated, indefinable thing called business, was absent, was dead.

As the summer months rolled heavily on, the most dependable orders fell off, and in spite of Alex's desperate expedencies there were few new ones. A pall of inactivity slowly, remorselessly descended. At the directors' table of the Pittsburgh Iron & Steel Alex wrestled with his new problems there and had the satisfaction of seeing a growing deference and respect upon the other men's faces. But that was not enough. His year of grace was

relentlessly passing, and against all his hopes, his confidence, his honest, sober judgment, he saw looming before him a day of reckoning which he could not withstand.

Through these months of stress Jack White's frequent visits brightened the house. True to his first request, he was likely to turn up unexpectedly on a Thursday when Meggy was preparing dinner herself. He always had a different story, each more absurd than the last. He was a poor hobo, riding the freights. Could the kind madam give him a ham and an egg on the kitchen table? He was a salesman carrying the latest kitchen appliances. If the madam would just permit him to demonstrate? He was the expressman, bearing a box addressed to Master Ranald MacTay which he was under bond to open in the presence of the assignee. . . . His jokes were endless. He seemed to bring to the brick house the enlivening it needed. Ranald worshiped him abjectly, and both Meggy and Alex found release in his presence: Alex from the ghastly pressure of fear that beset him now day and night; Meggy from her anxiety over Alex. She had long since ceased to think of Jack as a personage. With utter simplicity and affection she regarded him somewhat in the light of a brother. She had never known anyone like him, man or woman, with whom she could be consistently gay. She teased him as she never would have dreamed of teasing Alex; and entered delightedly into the games he invented for Ranald's entertainment. She asked his advice often, too, concerning the devious ways of society, and entered his comments and suggestions in her little green book. In all, she experienced with him a quality of friendship she had never known before.

"I don't believe you even know how to be serious," she told him, laughing one night at his antics.

He looked up quickly.

"Ah, dear lady, you misjudge me! I'm really now at last a most responsible citizen. Salesman extraordinary for the Central Railroad—if you wish my title! My business acumen is much greater than I get any credit for because I never offer my opin-

ions as profundities. I just toss 'em off lightly for all and sundry. But I'm right pretty often, at that!"

He paused, then added as an afterthought, "Lonely people are apt to be serious at heart."

Meggy glanced up in astonishment.

"Lonely! You can't mean that you're lonely!"

"I can't remember when I was anything else."

Her eyes as they studied him were full of compassion. Their look held still a virginal quality in spite of her motherhood and the passionate love that existed between her and Alex. It was the innocence which knows no evil. For through the years Alex, while spending most of his time in a rough man's world, had permitted no word or breath of it to touch her. The deep restraint of his own nature forbade any carrying over of the coarse vulgarities of his outside contacts into his private life.

It was the innocence of her pity that smote Jack now with unendurable pain.

"Oh, you must come to see us whenever you feel so, and we'll cheer you up. No—that's all wrong to put it that way, for it's you who cheer us! But come at any rate. You'll know there's always a place for you here, and a warm welcome."

"Thanks, Meggy. I'll never forget that."

That night she said to Alex: "I'm sorry for Jack White. I thought he was so gay and happy, without a care in the world, and today he told me he had always been lonely. He lost his mother when he was a child and grew up in boarding schools and . . ."

Alex was not even listening. When she questioned him he only said heavily, "I've no time to pity anybody but myself the now."

In another month Meggy realized the full import of this statement, for there came a time when Alex's face was gray. He ate little and slept less. To all her pleadings he was dumb. Once he even said: "Sh! Meggy, don't talk to me. I can't stand it. I've got to think."

For the great blow was about to fall. Colonel Selden had threatened to call his loans.

It happened on a dark December day when the city of Pittsburgh reeked miserably of smoke and misty rain. The whole world seemed worn out and shoddy and defeated. Alex stood in the Colonel's office white-lipped and heard his sentence. The Colonel's voice shook as he pronounced it.

"I'm sorry, Alex. I'm sorry! But I warned you of this. I have to do my duty in spite of personal feeling. Your loan's due one month from today, and I can't renew it. Not the way things are now."

"This'll ruin me."

"I warned you!"

Neither could trust himself to speak further. Alex turned, and left the bank. For an hour he walked blindly through the streets—Diamond, Liberty, Penn Avenue—trying to master the trembling that had overtaken him. A nausea swept him along with a shattering weakness as though his great body had turned enemy to him also. He knew now how those men felt who wept, who pleaded and agonized in Colonel Selden's private office. "Jones has failed." "Smith has failed." These had been words to him before. He knew now the utter bitterness, the utter desperation of their meaning. "*MacTay has failed.*" He shuddered.

The long years of struggle, with his very life's blood cementing them, massed themselves in his mind like a superstructure ready now to topple and crash in ruins. He even saw himself back again on the farm working the old coal bank. The thought revolted him. He would never do that. Never! And yet, his remorseless brain told him, he might come to it.

He dragged himself at last toward Union Station and sank down on a bench there to await his train. He could see himself as he had passed and repassed on other days through the familiar building: strong, sure, with power in his grasp and fortune achieved. He had half seen here before, as he strode by, men with vacant eyes and inert limbs sitting on the seats. Not

travelers, but hunted men, pursued by the hounds, catching brief respite here before they must move on. He had scorned these men before; now suddenly he knew their pain.

When he reached home Meggy was out. He went upstairs and flung himself upon the bed until the sickness would be passed. As he lay he thought of his mother and of the night he had left Scotland. Was it for this moment of defeat that he had crossed the sea? Was it for this that he had buried that strange power in himself that once had risen beating for expression, even as physical desire sought appeasement?

MacTay has failed. So the word would run from lip to lip.

He heard Meggy come in later with Ranald. Their voices drifted through the rooms below. When she came up at last, she cried out in fright at sight of him.

"Alex! Oh, what is it?"

He sat up, gaunt and disheveled.

"I'm ruined," he said. "They've called my loan. It'll finish me."

Meggy's face was baffled, distressed. The financing of the business had always been incomprehensible to her, for Alex never discussed that phase of it with her. He explained now in a few sentences, then dropped his head in his hands.

She stroked his hair gently.

"It means we'll be—poor."

"Aye."

"Don't worry, Alex," she said quietly. "I'm sorry for all your work to be lost, but you can make a good living somehow."

"A living!" he burst out.

"And we can always go back to the farm."

"We may have to," he said, utter desolation in his voice.

At the dinner table he drank a cup of black coffee and pushed away the other food.

"I'm goin' down to the office, Meggy. Don't wait up for me. I've got to think this out by myself."

She followed him to the door.

"Don't look so tragic, Alex. So *desperate*. It breaks my heart. Remember we still have each other, and Ranald."

Alex winced.

"I wanted to take the boy into the business with me some day," he said.

When the house was quiet Meggy sat in her own room thinking. In view of the despair in Alex's face, she felt ashamed of her own heart's calmness. Why did the loss of their wealth not mean more to her? Why did her life as she led it here still in a sense seem unreal and unsubstantial?

They might go back to the farm, he had said! At once her mind was at home in its imaginings. They would divide the house! It was amply large. She would furnish the big square rooms with her new furniture. They would blossom with it! In the evenings she and Alex and Ranald would sit together around the blazing grate fire in the winter or on the high porch facing the hills in summer. Alex and the boy would grow together there. There would be understanding at last between them. It could not be otherwise on the farm with Ranald running about with him, working according to his strength beside him, no driving tension then to separate them.

And more than this. Meggy felt the hot blood rising in her cheeks. Back on the farm, with the old freedom, the old oneness she used to feel for wind and sun, for seedtime and harvest, with Alex unstrained by care and single-hearted, something else might happen. The deep desire of her heart would yet be fulfilled. There would be another child. She knew it with a sharp certitude that pierced her with longing.

So she sat as the hours passed, afraid in her secret hope, ashamed of this humble ravishment of her heart, while she knew Alex was alone in the office suffering under his desperate burden of defeat.

It was two o'clock when she heard him come in. Strange how

with his mere entrance the house always seemed suddenly awake. He came up at once, standing in the doorway, a figure of energized despair.

"I'm not givin' up," he said through his teeth. "I tell you I'll never give up to the last hour. I'll fecht my way through this somehow." His voice broke, but he controlled it. "There's always a way out, Meggy, an' I've got to find it."

But at the end of a week the way out had not appeared. It was necessary now to tell the whole truth to McKelvey and to Gilly and Pat. This for Alex was sheer torture. It was not only the loss of his pride and his prestige among them; it was their genuine distress for him and their panic for themselves in the new involvement. What would become of the Magnus? What would happen to the Scotia? McKelvey took to his bed with what he called a cold but what they all knew was merely shock and anxiety. He had gone at once to see Colonel Selden himself, but had come home gloomier than when he went.

And another week came to a hopeless end. Suddenly one day Alex dispatched a message to Jack White.

"He's got a better head on him than he lets on," he told Meggy. "He might have some idea . . . An' I've got to try everything!"

Alex had taken to pacing the floor at night, back and forth, back and forth until nearly dawn, when he would fling himself down for a mere hour or so before starting again on his ceaseless efforts. His eyes were swollen and bloodshot from lack of sleep, and his clothes hung limply on his great frame.

Jack replied to the message at once and in person. He came to the brick house early one morning before Alex had left it. His outward demeanor was still cheerfully casual as he spoke to Meggy and pulled a cake of chocolate from his hat to delight Ranald. When he had settled himself to the breakfast Meggy hurriedly ordered for him he looked at Alex quizzically.

"In a jam, old man?"

Alex told him the situation briefly.

"How much do you stand to lose?" Jack asked.

"Everything I've got."

Jack whistled. "No penny ante about you, is there, Alex?"

Then he looked across at Meggy, who was intent upon pouring his coffee.

"How are you?" he asked with emphasis.

Meggy looked up with her usual smile, though her face was pale.

"Oh, I'm all right except for worrying over Alex."

"Just over Alex, eh?"

"Why, yes! He doesn't eat or sleep, and he's gotten so thin. Look at him! Do you wonder I'm anxious? He'll go down sick. That's what I'm afraid of."

"I put up this house, too," Alex went on. "I've got to find a way out. I'm nigh desperate!"

"But I tell him," Meggy broke in eagerly, "we could go back to the farm for a while anyway. The house there is so big. I could make a beautiful place of it! And we'd always have a living."

Jack looked at her keenly. When he rose from the table he said:

"Listen, Alex. You go on down to the office and dust off the chairs for a conference. You and I'll hash this thing over. But I have to speak privately to Meggy first—ah—Christmas secrets and all that. Be after you in a few minutes. O.K.?"

Alex left, and Jack led the way to the parlor. He made sure the doors were closed; then he looked at Meggy. His voice was very gentle.

"You would really like to go back to the farm, wouldn't you, Meggy?"

She drew a quick breath.

"Yes, I'm afraid I would. For so many reasons. If it should happen that way."

"That's just what I wanted to find out. Well, I'll be running

along now. Good-bye, and thanks ever so much for my breakfast."

Meggy's eyes were startled. She caught his sleeve.

"Jack, wait! What do you mean by that—about wanting to find out . . . Had you some idea, some way to help Alex?"

"Oh, I was merely curious to know which way your greatest happiness would lie," he said, trying to speak lightly. "You see, you're not like most women."

"You have an idea then for him!"

"It may be no good. I don't think any man in the world except Alex could make it work. Maybe even he can't."

"But you'll tell him now! You'll help him all you can! You'll forget what I just said. . . . I never thought— Promise me, Jack!"

"You are sure that is your wish?"

"How could you ever doubt it?"

He looked steadily into her eyes, shining with their tender light.

"How could I," he said, "knowing you? Well, here I'm off to the round table. Knight White to the rescue! Only as I told you, Meggy, the idea I have may not hold water for a minute. I think in the long run, you'll get your farm."

"But you'll do all you can for Alex?" Her voice was still anxious.

"To the last ditch."

"Bless you, Jack!"

"I ask for no better saint, Meggy."

He walked slowly down the street, pondering sadly on the mysteries of love. At the foot of the office stairs he muttered: "The damned fool! If I were as rich as Alex I'd let mere money go to the devil."

After which paradoxical remark to himself he climbed the stairs and settled to the business in hand. His suggestion was this. In Philadelphia there was a firm of private bankers, Duncan & Company, who made a specialty of financing promising

projects. It was a bad time now to approach them, but as a last resort Alex might try to induce them to issue more stock on his company and sell it to a group of subscribers. This would raise the money he needed, and the connection with a firm like Duncan's would certainly do him no harm.

"But to be honest with you, Alex, I don't think they'll do it. Not the way things are at the present. I wouldn't even suggest it to any other man. But you've moved mountains before. You might try your hand at this one. It's a chance anyway."

Alex's face was tense.

"Let me get this straight now."

For an hour they went over it together; then Jack got up.

"I've got to go into Pittsburgh on some business for Father. Think this over, and if you decide to go ahead with it—"

"I'm takin' the next train east."

"Why, man, that'll get you no further ahead. The bank will be closed when you get there!"

"Aye, but I'll be on the ground at least. It's doing nothing that drives me distracted. Tonight at the hotel I'll be massin' my facts an' be at the bank the first thing in the morning."

"Wait, then, I'll give you a letter of introduction to young Duncan. I know him. It's the old man you want to get at, though."

"I'll get at him, if he's livin'."

"I'll bet you will. Good luck, Alex."

"Thanks, White. I can't just tell you—"

For the first time Jack saw Alex shaken.

"Pshaw, it's nothing! Only a long shot. But take it."

"I'm takin' it. No fears!"

When Alex went back to the house he ate a hearty meal for the first time in two weeks. He dressed carefully, said good-bye to Meggy and then left for Philadelphia. He was gone for six days. To Meggy, starting at the sound of the front door's opening, listening for the telephone, the doorbell, the postman, rousing anxiously from her sleep at the imagined sound of his

foot on the stairs, they were interminable days. In her prayers she struggled wretchedly with her conflicting hopes and desires. Whatever her petition, she felt her heart swinging to the opposite side. Then she decided to pray no more about the business but leave it entirely in the hands of God.

Alex walked in out of a snowstorm late one night as she was preparing to put out the lights. At sight of him and the feel of his arms and lips, she knew once again how great was her love for him, how indissoluble the tie that united them. Nothing mattered but Alex. Nothing!

"How did you get on?" she asked, trying to keep her voice from trembling.

He threw off his greatcoat and stood with his back to the fire. There was power again in every line of his body.

"It's not settled," he said, "but I've won the first step anyway. They're sendin' an engineer out to look over the plants an' the land. Don't be hopin' too hard, Meggy, for we might be dashed yet, but I think we're goin' to come out on the top."

Jack White, who learned this much at once from Alex, got the full details of the negotiations from the younger Duncan in Philadelphia. They met at the club one night, and Duncan began at once.

"As man to man, Jack, what was your idea in setting that MacTay chap on us? We're a peaceful firm. We've never done anybody any harm. And we've always treated you decently enough—"

"What's the matter?" Jack grinned.

"Well, it was like this. He came in, this Scotch giant of yours, with your note to me. I asked him his business and then told him we were not doing any more financing at the present. He just looked through me as if I wasn't there. 'I'll be seein' your father,' says he. 'Impossible,' I said. 'He has appointments for every minute of today and tomorrow too.' 'I've got to see him,' he says, 'if I stay in this office for a week.' By gum, I felt as if I'd been hit on the head with a blackjack! Intimidated, that's

what I was! I said I'd see what I could do. Told Father to have him in and get it over with. He did. Told him same story I had: No go, definitely; no more financing at the present; very sorry!"

He stopped for breath, and Jack inquired, "That finished MacTay, I suppose?"

"Finished him! My eye, if he wasn't on the doorstep the next morning when the bank opened! Nothing short of the militia could keep him out of Father's office. Walked right past everybody as if they weren't there. Talked for an hour with Father till the old man promised to think it over, just to get rid of him. By the next day everybody in the office was calling him 'Samson.' He's a tremendous creature, you know, and he did need a haircut, rather. By Jove, if he didn't seem to stir things up just by walking through the room. Well, to make a long story short, he came back for five days in succession! Yes, sir. By that time Father was really beginning to say there might be something in the idea, and I said for the sake of the great gray cat to do something for him or he might pull the whole works down on our heads. So we've sent out an engineer to look over his set-up—"

Duncan's face grew suddenly serious. "Damned if I don't think we've got a good chance to sell stock on that, White. Look what he's got! Steel mill, two coke plants, acres of raw material—proved coal! Why, the thing sounds perfect. If it goes through, I'm going to buy in some for myself."

Jack laughed softly.

"He's got you, too," he said. "Well, you'll find he has everything he says he has."

"By the way," Duncan added, "I forgot to say my kid sister came into the office one day and took one good look at him and decided he was the man of her dreams. Diamond in the rough, and all that. She wants me to find out if he's tied up."

"He is. Absolutely and completely."

"Too bad. I really like the get-up of the fellow myself. He's got sand. Well, I'm sorry he's so permanently married."

"So am I," Jack said absently. Then he caught himself up fiercely. It had not mattered, though. Duncan had passed on.

The engineer sent out by Duncans made a thorough survey and returned a favorable report. Alex was informed that the house would issue new stock on his company and attempt to sell it. It would take at least thirty days for them to assure him, however, that the subscriptions were successful.

He secured a thirty-day extension on his loan from Colonel Selden—who sat back in his chair stunned at the news of the refinancing project, relieved enormously on the one hand that there was still hope, and yet feeling uncomfortably that he had driven Alex into the arms of a more farseeing banker than he. He was sadly conscious, too, of a change in Alex's manner toward him. "And yet, what else could I have done?" he asked himself when he was alone. "I wish, though, I could have seen him through to the finish."

The next month was endless. Duncans had told him well that the plan might fail. People were suspicious of buying stocks just now. All that could be done was to make the attempt. . . . Alex suffered the last throes of inactivity and suspense as the slow, torturing days passed.

At last on a late afternoon in February, as he was preparing to leave the office, a telegram came. His hands were unsteady as he tore it open. It read:

Subscriptions now complete. Please send us definite instructions for payment of proceeds.

DUNCAN & COMPANY

Alex read it over and over again. Then, catching his hat, he ran down the stairs and hurried along the street. Before the night was over they would all know the great news: Meggy, McKelvey, Pat, and Gilly. He would have them all in at the house; tell them all together; hear their shouting, their laughter, their congratulations! "He's done it again!" they would all

say. "He's done it again!" And the words would be sweet to him. They would talk it all over till the crack of dawn.

But just now for a little while he wanted to be alone, out in the open somewhere. He wanted room to stretch his arms above him and feel with his whole body and soul that the burden was lifted.

As he neared the house he knew what he would do. He went to the stable and got his horse, giving John a message for Mrs. MacTay that he would be back within the hour. He rode hard out into the country, exulting in the plunging animal's strength and his control over it. He rode to the crest of a certain hill where he and McKelvey had stood one night and watched the glow from the new coke ovens coloring the sky. He reined the horse and sat there gazing intently upon the sweeping scene before him. The sunset had all gone except for a faint cold yellow in the west, and the darkness was coming on rapidly enough to show the flaming fires between the hills. They rode from the Scotia and the Magnus. And now they would never be put out! They were saved to him! They would go on sending their steady flares into the night. More than this, new rows of flame would soon be burning to the east. As his glance swept the horizon Alex had a vision of a great circle of fire. It was a symbol of himself. Fire, the unconquerable! He felt a brother to it. He felt within his own being the consuming might of those long rows of ovens; he felt in his very body the white power of the molten steel in the great Pittsburgh mills. For now his enterprise would go on. It would go from strength to strength. The possibilities were boundless. *MacTay had not failed!*

A new and sudden joy shook him as he thought of his son. It was not the boy Ranald whom he saw in his mind. It was a strong man like himself, an extension of his own personality, another MacTay, who would take over the business one day when he, Alex, would be past his prime. In this other man, this continuation of himself, the great MacTay interests would some time be vested. Perhaps in still another generation his son would

carry on in coal and steel. There was a thought bigger than the moment! There was invincibility, immortality even!

A mood of still greater exultation fell upon Alex. He was alone on the hilltop in the still winter night. There was no one to hear. He raised his head in the one great abandon of his lifetime and shouted his challenge to the heavens.

"Let the years come on, now! Aye, let them come!"

CHAPTER X

AND the years came: swift, onrushing years, each catching momentum from the one before. Meggy's one-time dream of returning to the farm to live had faded now into such a dim shadow that it scarcely even reappeared in the wakeful dead of night. Alex's dreams, on the other hand, seemed all in a fair way to realization. In the prosperous times following the depression, he had built the great house where they now lived on one of the commanding hills just outside of Greensburg. As nearly as he could remember, it was patterned after the Laird's house back in Lamson. The architect had entered into the spirit of his wishes and achieved finally a handsome residence of the solid British type. The great hall was Alex's chief pride, though to Meggy it always seemed dark, formidable and unhomelike.

Once, swept away by old memories, he had stood by the wide stairway and said as though thinking aloud, "Yes, it was just about here I stood the night of the serenade at the Laird's when I sang the song I'd made up for the bride!"

"The song you made up!" Meggy echoed in quick amazement.

Alex was embarrassed in a way Meggy could not understand by her questions. She kept this strange news, however, as a treasure jealously guarded to bring forth at a suitable time for Ranald.

"Your father wrote some verses once, too," she told him triumphantly one night when they were alone.

"Father!" He gave a short laugh. "I can't somehow picture him in a poetic mood."

Meggy felt a hurt from his tone in her own heart.

"It was a long time ago, of course," she faltered.

"It must have been."

Alex showed certain outward changes in these years of settled success. His blond hair had a grayish sheen now; his suits were all made by the best Pittsburgh tailor (who worshiped his stature), and his speech, while still softened by his native accent, had only an occasional strong Scotticism in it. His constant "aye" had—except on rare occasions—become "yes." There was no question now of his position. Pittsburgh like Greensburg treated him as a man of authority. As he sat in his office at the Iron & Steel plant, he knew that his word there was final. It was not only because he owned 40 per cent of the stock; it was because under his direction the company had expanded and prospered. With the fierce concentration which had marked his attack upon all his other ventures, he had set himself at once to learn the business of steel. Now he knew it better than many who had grown up in the mills. Most important of all, he knew by instinct the psychology of marketing it. With no slightest touch of the usual salesman's manner, he continued to secure contracts where loquacious lesser men failed. Even according to his wildest dream, the name of Mac-Tay of Pittsburgh was already spoken in the council chambers of New York.

Sometimes as she watched him across the wide table in their paneled dining room Meggy saw him as two men. There was the youth from the old country, untutored, almost rough, who had kissed her that long-ago night in the snow, and who in the old farm kitchen would put aside his figuring to sing "Rabin Tamson's Smiddy" and dance lightheartedly with Pat on the bare floor. She made of this youth a reality even now to hold in her heart. The other man, more handsome, more powerful, more physically attractive, seemed to belong by nature in the great rooms of the new house; but he laughed less each year and never sang now. At times as Meggy looked upon him she saw

him as a stranger; and yet a stranger between whom and herself there burned the fire of love.

The changes in Meggy had been chiefly those within. Her outward appearance remained much the same, for her hair was that peculiar gold which longest resists the first gray hair, and the natural sweetness of her spirit had kept her brow unlined. There was, however, a wistful droop about the lips, and her own laugh came less frequently. Though she was entirely unaware of it, she had the great lady's casual acceptance of grandeur. A smaller-minded or more worldly woman would have shown by self-consciousness or pride that she was not accustomed to the elegance in which she now walked. But, because deep in Meggy's heart she was indifferent to it, she moved as a lady to the manner born. She had at last outgrown her little green book of directions, and Greensburg in its turn had almost forgotten that she was the daughter of old Bill Parkinson, the horse trader. This was made more easy by the fact that Bill was never seen in the county seat now. When the great new house was building Bill had honestly tried to be enthusiastic—the more so because he saw that Meggy was not. He went all over it before the workmen left, but after that he refused to enter it.

"Tell you how it is, Meggy," he said with a great show of candor. "I ain't as young as I used to be, an' this year past I think these trips to town have been kinda hard on me."

"Father!"

"Sure they have. I'm gettin' to be like that old mule of Jake Duffy's. There ain't a square kick left in me. So you just come out to the farm as often as you can, an' don't look for me in—"

"Father!"

He could not pretend to ignore the meaning of that cry. He patted her shoulder gently.

"Now that's all right, Meggy. Don't you worry nothin' about me. You jist go ahead an' live in your fine house. You gotta keep up with that man of yours. Jist—jist come out home whenever you can. . . ."

So Meggy went more often than before, finding the old release whenever she did so. Sitting in the familiar kitchen, she told Tirzah all the details of the dinners and teas and receptions which she had attended. For Alex's connection with the Pittsburgh now meant many social contacts in Pittsburgh as well. Tirzah would listen to the recited glories with calm interest.

"My, that must have been grand! You'll have to tell that over to your father when he comes in. Put an apron on now, Meggy, and start the supper, will you, while I finish the heel of this sock."

And Meggy would comply, thinking with a smile, "Mother's always the same."

The other visits that nourished some deep need of her heart were those to the gray frame house where Pat and Kathleen lived. Alex had been as good as his word. The new house which stood upon the hill overlooking the Magnus mine was large and imposing, with wide porches and a bay window which Kathleen had asked for timidly and accepted with something akin to worship from Alex's hand. Meggy pondered often, however, upon the relatively few changes in the Crowdeys' way of living which the new house had made. The sweeping porches were as full of tops, blocks, wagons and tricycles as the little old one at the end of the "patch" had been. Within, there was the same well worn look to the furniture; the same saints looking down from the walls; the same mingled odor of freshly baked bread and small drying garments coming from the kitchen. For there was always a new baby in the house.

Kathleen was heavier than she once had been. "Just a nice armful," Pat would remark, proving it as he passed her. She was still rosy, contented and cheerful. There were seven children now, ranging from young Pat, a tall boy the image of his father but without his gaiety, down to tiny Jerry who completed the family so far. Pat hinted with glee, however, that the number might not remain stationary.

"I hate to be chargin' it to ye, Alex, you an' me bein' such long-standin' friends an' all, but Kathleen here does be sayin' that you're responsible for her last child!" Pat had announced one noon with a wicked solemnity when Meggy was spending the day with them and Alex had stopped in for dinner.

Alex, who made no jokes upon such subjects, glared at Pat while Kathleen called him a "spalpeen" and bade him keep a decent tongue if he could.

"It's the truth, an' you needn't be denyin' it. Didn't you tell me, Kathy, that if Alex here hadn't built us such a big house I wouldn't have thought we had to be fillin' it up? Sure ye did! An' there's still one room empty, glory be to God! We'll see what we can be doin' about that, Alex."

Kathleen blushed like a girl and scolded Pat vigorously through her laughter. But the jest, which Meggy knew Alex would merely consider unbecoming and forget the next moment, remained in her own heart like a barb. For years now, the sad foreknowledge had fallen upon her that she would never bear another child. It was as though some warm, life-giving vitality had been drained out of her. She always felt the pain of this more deeply after her visits to the Crowdeys', where life had a different emphasis and existence seemed happily justified at the long table framed with young faces.

When she returned to her own great house on the other hill she was smitten with its heavy quiet. But she knew, even as the weight of it fell upon her heart, that she belonged there with Alex, and must accept her destiny.

So, after these brief respites, she took up again the round of engagements that now—to Alex's great pride—filled most of her days. It was this pride of his, this ingenuous joy at her final social success, that Meggy lived upon when in her own heart the days seemed futile. She knew with a little half-smile of amusement that she was reputed to be one of the best dressed women in Greensburg. She glimpsed a fleeting look of envy on other

women's faces as she stepped into the fine "auto" which John now drove with pride and efficiency, or when she moved as hostess through the big rooms of the house on the hill in which she could never somehow feel completely at home.

Sometimes she took herself sharply to task for her apathy. Sometimes as she knelt in her richly furnished bedchamber she prayed earnestly that God would make her more thankful for all her blessings.

"... with this wonderful house and all the money and everything, I pray Thee to forgive me for being so—so—"

Even to God she could not quite explain the puzzling unrest of her heart. Even to Him she would not entirely give words to the old anxiety, grown stronger with the years, with which she watched the two dearest to her. To do so seemed treasonable to Alex, and more than that the admission of it broke down in her mind the great pretense which she had carefully and for so long tried to foster: the pretense that there was a perfect family unity, that father, mother and son were one in their love and their understanding of one another.

For of all the changes which the years had brought, none were so marked as those which had played upon the growing boy. He was seventeen now, tall, vigorous and handsome with that early maturity upon him which had marked Alex in his own youth. His hair was browner than his father's, and his eyes still had the strange mixture of colors which gave them at times a clear, burning quality and at others the darkness of shadowy water. His whole face had a strength so marked that Meggy glancing sometimes from him to Alex felt a tremor of fear. But while Ranald had his father's resolute cast of countenance he had also his own humorous, ready smile and the quick upleap of sympathy in his eyes.

"If they just never really clash!" Meggy often said to herself.

Her efforts to prevent this never ceased. At meals she always talked on brightly, nervously, looking from one to the other, careful to keep away from controversial topics, trying always to

bring Ranald and Alex into conversation together. But it was rarely successful. Alex was silent by nature, and Ranald, while normally talkative, froze into quietness in his father's presence.

The truth was that the reserve which had shown itself long ago in their relations had increased with the years. As a father, Alex had possessed no native gift for entering a child's mind or even that of a growing boy. More than this, he had had neither the patience nor the sympathy to acquire this gift at the sacrifice of his own time and convenience. As he had explained more than once to Meggy, in the old days he had been too busy with important matters to be "fussin' over bairns," even his own. So in the small boy's mind there had gradually developed a certain image of his parent: that of a man of great physical strength, quick and decisive of voice, never unkind to him and yet never actually affectionate; a man entirely removed from all his own important childish interests. As he had grown older this image had changed but little, and the reserve, unconscious on Alex's part, had become deliberate on the part of his son. Meggy, pouring out her love upon them both, yearning over them, found her heart torn between them in spite of all her brave pretending. She had even found herself lately resorting to pathetic little subterfuges in order that neither might feel neglected. She had begun to suspect that Ranald with his fine perception understood the whole situation even while Alex was largely unaware of it.

She was convinced of this one September evening in the autumn of Ranald's last year in the local schools. He had come home late, almost at dinnertime, his face full of excitement.

"Hi! Mrs. Meggy MacTay!" he called from the front door.

Meggy hurried to meet him, glancing anxiously about to be sure that Alex had not arrived. He would not approve of this soubriquet though she loved it. It was one of the many small secrets left over from Ranald's childhood which she shared with him. As a little boy he used to chant it in connection with all their visits to the farm:

"Mrs. Meggy MacTay
Is going away!"

And then when they returned:

"Mrs. Meggy MacTay
Is home to stay!"

"Hello, dear. How did everything go?"

"Fine. I've got a piece of news for you."

"Are you—"

"I am. Editor-in-chief of the famous old *Green and Gold*. Haven't I an added look of importance since morning?"

"Ranald! That's splendid! It's a real honor. And just the sort of work you like best!"

"Listen, Mother. I've been working over a new layout and some ideas I want to spring at our staff meeting tomorrow. Could you come up to my room tonight and let me go over them with you? I'd like to show you my plans while they're all hot." His voice was eager.

"Why, of course! I'd love to! Right after dinner! Yes, I'm sure that will be all right. Here comes your father now, dear. Hurry and get ready. You know he doesn't like to be kept waiting."

The meal went pleasantly enough until the end of it.

"I'd like to take a good drive tonight in the new car," Alex said suddenly, looking at Meggy. "Could we start right after dinner?"

Meggy hesitated.

"Why, I suppose so. In about half an hour perhaps," she said, looking across at Ranald.

"Why not right away? We want all the daylight we can get."

"Ranald's been wanting a ride in the new car," Meggy countered gently. "Maybe he could come along?"

"It's a school night," Alex said with a faint trace of displeasure. "He's got work to do. Haven't you?" he asked.

And then Meggy heard the boy's voice with a new note in it. It was almost as though a parent with wisdom and understanding was speaking to a child.

"Yes," he said, "I've plenty of work to do. You go right ahead, Mother, as soon as dinner's over. It's a nice night for a drive. You go right along. Don't bother about me."

He knew then, Meggy thought to herself. He understood how it was with them all as a family, and he was trying to make it easy for her. Her eyes met his, and his smile touched her heart. She was very loath to break her promise to him. If Alex were only capable of understanding what this new appointment meant to Ranald and how natural it was that he should want to talk it all over with someone now, tonight, when the first flush of the honor was upon him! But she hesitated to tell him even the news itself, and she knew Ranald would not do so, for all through the years the boy's bent for writing had seemed a source of irritation to his father.

When the meal was ended Meggy got her hat and coat at once. Ranald was waiting for her in the hall.

"Has Father gone on out to the car?"

"I think so. Ranald, I'm so sorry not to hear the plans tonight, but I couldn't very well refuse the drive. You'll be sure to tell me everything again?"

"Of course! That's all right. Don't you worry."

"Do you really have so much work to do now? Couldn't you come along? You've wanted a ride so badly."

The boy hesitated.

"Oh, it's not just the work, but—well, I think Father likes to have you all to himself—I mean he— Well, I don't think I'd better go, Mother. I really do have a lot of stuff to get ready for the paper."

Meggy kissed him tenderly and turned quickly to the door so that he could not read her eyes.

But Ranald went on up the stairs whistling. He was genuinely disappointed in the way the evening had turned out, but he was

still happy. As a matter of fact great forces were at work upon him just then. All sorts of ambitions, aspirations, crystallizing ideals, pressed upon his spirit like white fire, while the growing strength and early maturity of his body with all its deep significance stirred and quickened him. But, most important of all, he was in love. He knew now that always since childhood it had been Cynthia; but the present consciousness of it was like a rushing stream of joy. All that was vital in his experience now, all that had meaning, was in some glowing and mysterious way related to her.

He swung into his own room, leaving the door open behind him. The servants were all below, and he had the rest of the house to himself. He roamed about the room for a moment, humming a tune and thinking of the delights of his new job. He would put the best he had into that little magazine, reorganize it, go out for new ideas, maybe use some of his own stuff in it now and then that he had always been afraid to submit before. He grinned. He'd played enough football the last three years to shut the fellows' mouths about his writing poetry. So now perhaps he could come out with it if he wanted to.

With this thought came the recollection of some verses, not his own, which had been recurring to him now for days. It was no new thing for him to be shaken by the beauty of words. But these particular words, so plain, so unadorned, had conjured up vividly before him a scene which he had never known and yet for which he felt a pang of longing like homesickness.

He began suddenly to repeat them aloud now as he moved about sorting his books and papers:

"Blows the wind today, and the sun and the rain are flying,
Blows the wind on the moors today and now,
Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying,
My heart remembers how!"

He spoke the words slowly, clearly, feeling their strength and cadence. Then he stopped, startled, and wheeled about at a

sound from the doorway. His father stood there. So he had still been upstairs!

"What you were just sayin' there—did you make it up yourself?" Alex asked sharply.

Ranald gave a nervous laugh.

"I only wish I had. No, it's Stevenson. Something I came across lately that I liked."

Then as his father still looked at him, saying nothing, he went on impulsively, scarcely knowing why he did so.

"It's a description of the Galloway country in Scotland where the old Covenanters are buried. . . . They were martyred there, you know—lots of them—and if you pull the grasses apart they say you can see the old Communion stones yet where they gathered for their conventicles when the troopers were after them. And all around for miles and miles stretch the moors covered with heather. And the winds—" He stopped abashed, for Alex's eyes were fixed upon him with the peculiar look that Ranald had known at times since childhood. It was not altogether disapproval. It was a sort of alien pain, a struggle, a bitterness. Ranald knew only, as he grew older, that it was his presence that evoked this expression and inwardly shrank from it.

What he could not know now was that his father had been all ready to say to him, "I know the Galloway moors; I've parted the heather myself to see the old gray stones . . ." when he saw his son's eyes begin to deepen and shine with their own vision exactly as Marget his mother's used to do. And as Alex saw her rise as it were from the dead before him, he suffered. And suffering, he thrust the thought behind him, resentful of its rise.

He changed the subject abruptly.

"I've been wantin' to tell you that this last year now you've got to do better in your mathematics. I'll not sign any reports this term like some that came in last year. Mind that! You can do better on it if you try, and if you don't spend so much time on other things."

"Yes, sir," Ranald said respectfully, the usual reserve falling again upon him.

"An' another thing: it's time you were learnin' something about the works. You've hardly more than driven past them, have you?"

"I guess that's about all."

"Well, you're old enough now to be lookin' into the business. We'll start next Saturday morning. You can be ready to drive out with me to the Magnus."

"All right, Father."

Alex still waited in the doorway.

"An' there's another thing. Why must you always have your nose buried in a book of poetry? Why would you be up here repeatin' it out loud to yourself? That's daidlin' business."

There was silence. A dull anger, which he could not himself have explained, showed in Alex's face.

"Answer me!" he said.

The boy flung up his head as if challenged, and Alex was startled at the strength of the chin as it was outlined against the light from the window.

"Well," he replied, "all I can say is that when I read poetry or—or try to make it up myself I feel such a pleasure, a certain kind of happiness—" He broke off abruptly. "I can't explain it to you," he said with grave finality. "You wouldn't understand."

He was still looking out the window, and so he did not see the line of his father's lips tighten. Alex turned and started down the stairs. Once he stopped, overcome by a surging longing to go back to that room to his son and tell him that once years ago he, too, had known.

But the thought was swallowed up in the reflection that what was behind him had best remain so. A confession of it might encourage the boy, and the main thing now was to get his mind off its woolgathering. It was high time to get him started in at the works. That would bring him down to earth quicker than anything else.

Alex talked little on the drive. Over and over again the words Ranald had been repeating to himself returned to his mind:

Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying,
My heart remembers how!

All that evening and far into the night his own heart was remembering. He was living again in Scotland. It had been years now since he had done this. But suddenly it seemed as though America and all it had brought him was wiped out. He went over the changes at Lamson Green. His father was gone now, also, but the black-bordered envelope when it came had had no real power over him. Lizzie had married, late in life, and lived on in the old cottage. He sent her money regularly, each time with the old pain that his generosity could avail his mother nothing. Peter Whinnery was an old man now, and no use as a shepherd; but the Laird let him live on in his little house near the sheepfold, and the neighbors were all good to him, stopping as they passed to make him a bit tea. He was proud that Alex remembered him and was all but greetin' when she gave him the pound note at the New Year like Alex had told her. So Lizzie wrote.

But after Marget's death the people at Lamson had always seemed shadowy. It was the land that rose up now to claim its absent son. It was Scotland itself that Alex saw as he lay wakeful in his bed: the wine-red moors of Galloway and the hills of sheep where he had roamed as a boy on his summer holidays; the pale purple look of the Cheviots from his mother's cottage door; the golden shocks of wheat lying at the harvest time just above the breaking tide; the red roofs of Berwick as they topped the silver Tweed . . . But by morning the country of his adoption had made him her own once more.

Meggy was enthusiastic over the plan of Ranald's going out to the Magnus. Indeed, she was pathetically pleased at any sign that either father or son showed an interest in the other's

society. She kept talking of it through the week and waved them off happily from the doorway on Saturday morning.

"As Ranald gets older," she thought to herself when they were gone, "they'll have more in common. Oh, I'll forgive the business everything, *everything*, if it brings them together."

But the day did not work out in that fashion, though both Alex's thoughts and those of the boy were much in line with Meggy's as they drove in silence along the country road. When they reached the Magnus, Pat was on hand to greet them heartily. He came up to the car when they got out, exclaiming over Ranald whom he had not seen during the summer.

"May the devil admire me, Alex, if he isn't toppin' you now by an inch! Look at the two of ye! A fine pair you're after makin', an' no mistake. But before long you'll have to take a back seat to the boy, I'm thinkin'."

It was true though Alex had not noticed it before. Ranald's frame was still boyish and unfilled out, but he had grown prodigiously during the summer on the farm where he spent all his holidays. Pat continued as Ranald wandered over to the office, where young Pat helped his father.

"An', be gob, Alex, he looks as if he had a will second only to your own. You'd better not try to drive that young one."

Alex was irritated. Only last night he had been especially conscious of the reappearance of the MacTay chin in his son. He resented Pat's advice on family matters.

"He's goin' to have a look round the works," he said. "It's time he was learnin' something of the business. I thought first of all—"

"Father," Ranald broke in, coming up to him, "I have an idea. Couldn't you turn me loose for the day? Let me wander round and study things as I come to them and pick up what information I can."

Alex was suddenly and thoroughly pleased. It was exactly the way he had set out to study the Rockwell works years ago. It was in the blood, then. It was in the blood.

"That's a good way to do," he agreed heartily now. "I'll go on my own way then an' pick you up here at four this afternoon. Keep your eyes open, mind, an' don't be afraid to ask questions."

"I'm going home with Pat to lunch," Ranald called over his shoulder. Like Meggy, he loved the rollicking, easy-going Crowdey household.

As Alex drove back to the Magnus that afternoon his strong lips were set in a line of unusual satisfaction. Something had happened that day outside of his immediate reckoning. In a totally unexpected fashion, there had been brought to him that very morning the complete fulfillment of a lifetime ambition! The mills of the years had ground slowly but surely, and the thing he had long ago planned and constantly purposed had been fulfilled to him at last. He was still full of the triumph of it, and in some strange way he found himself linking it like a fortunate omen with Ranald's first day at the works. He wondered how far into the mine the boy had gone. He used to be afraid to go in as a child: Alex disliked that. He would have taken him in whether or not if Meggy had not pleaded so with him. Now, though, Ranald was evidently taking to it from the way he had spoken that morning. "Let me wander round and study things and pick up what information I can." That's what he had said. Maybe after all, Alex thought, he had misjudged the lad a little. Maybe indeed he hadn't paid as much attention to him all along as he should. Now he was thinking—like Meggy—that as the boy grew older he could meet him, belike, on common ground, the business.

Ranald was waiting by the lamp house, warm, dirty and disheveled. His face was grave; but his eyes were bright, and his whole figure alive with action.

"Well, how did you get on?" his father asked as they started off.

"Fine! I don't know when I've been so interested. I'd like to start work tomorrow! Say, Father, what about my coming out every Saturday? I'd like to. I've got some ideas!"

Alex's heart expanded as though it would burst. "Why, that's just what you ought to be doin'! We'll plan for it. How far in did you get today?"

"In? Oh, I wasn't in the mine at all."

"But that's the place to start. Learn it first, an' then take up the coke yards."

"I wasn't in the coke yards either."

Alex's eyes left the road to look at his son in astonishment.

"Well, where were you then? In the office all day?"

"No, I was in the patch. That's the part that interests me: the people; those hunkies. I talked to a lot of them, and I snooped round as much as I could. Say, their houses are pretty bad, Father. They must be hot as the deuce in summer and hard to heat in the winter—just shells. I suppose," he said with slow regret, "we couldn't build them all over right away, but I'll tell you what I thought of."

He was not looking at his father's face, and so in his eagerness he went right on.

"Build new back porches, bigger ones. That would help a lot in summer anyway and it wouldn't cost very much. And then plant trees. That wouldn't cost anything really. Set trees out all through the patch, and in a few years they'd be big enough to make shade in summer and break the wind in winter too. I'd be glad to sort of—well, you know, sort of take hold of this and see it through if you'd like."

Alex was literally dumb with amazement and anger. Ranald, assuming the silence was due to interest, went on hurriedly.

"Then I loafed round the company store for a while. I've wondered sometimes about the store. I got a shock today. Some things are higher there than in Greensburg. Did you know that? Not much, of course. But I often shop for Mother, so I remembered prices. You're not trying to make money on the store, are you?"

Alex gave a strange sound. "What in the name of God do

you suppose I'm runnin' a store for if it isn't to make money?"

"But," said the boy bewildered, "I thought the company store was just for the good of the miners—just a convenience for them because they were too far away from town. Why, I thought they sort of got things cheaper there instead of—"

His voice all at once grew firm. "Just about how much do you clear from the store?"

This struck Alex as the first sensible and businesslike remark Ranald had made.

"Well," he said, "I count on clearin' about a thousand dollars a month. Sometimes two. Lots of operators make more, but I keep to that. That's fair profit."

"Yes, fair profit," echoed the boy, but Alex did not catch the irony in his voice. "And you've three stores now, the Magnus, the Scotia and the new one."

"That's right."

"Well then, listen, Father. Why couldn't you take some of that money—that thirty or forty thousand—it's sort of extra money—and fix up the patches? Build new porches and paint the houses all different colors, pretty colors, not all that same awful red, and then put additions to some of them for the biggest families? Just make the miners more comfortable, sort of?"

Alex spoke now. His voice was angered, resolute and final.

"Now, just you hold on a minute. I brought you out here today to learn something about the coal business. I meant you to study the mines an' the coke yards. An' what do you do? You go danderin' up an' down the patch where you've no call to be at all. Now you can mind this. Our patches are as good as any in this end of the state. I pay my men decent wages. I treat them fair. But I'm not buildin' any new porches or settin' out trees or any such damn nonsense. You're talkin' like a child. An' from now on, you keep out of the patch the same as I do."

"But that's just it. If you don't go in you can't see how things are. There's one woman there—I talked to her: she's got five in

her own family, and she keeps three boarders besides, all in four rooms. That's pretty awful, isn't it?"

"That's none of my business. They like to herd up like animals."

"No, but this woman doesn't. She's nice and decent. She's keeping the boarders to earn enough money to get back to see her mother in the old country. She thinks in two more years she'll have enough if only her mother lives that long. And there's a woman just died in Number 47! I heard them all talking about it. I guess she—she was having a baby, and things didn't go right, and the doctor didn't get there in time or something. All the women were shaking their heads and saying, 'Too much carry water! All the time too much carry water!'"

"An' what's that got to do with me?" Alex asked sharply.

"Well, there could be more pumps put in, couldn't there? One to every couple of houses, at least. Oh, I don't know! Only it all seemed terrible with the little kids crying and the man, her husband, working away in the mine, not even knowing she was dead. It all seemed pretty sickening to me, the whole patch!"

"Well, keep out of it then. I won't have you in it! I'm telling you! You might make trouble for everybody. Now let's hear no more of it, an' next Saturday Pat'll take you into the mine where you should have been today. The whole trouble is," he added, "that you've had no experience, and you know nothing whatever about business."

"I've learned a few things today," Ranald said quietly. And this time Alex did not entirely miss the irony.

To Meggy's great disappointment the two seemed less inclined than ever to talk to each other over the dinner table. Even afterwards alone with him, she found Ranald reticent.

"Oh, I wandered round the patch and talked to the people, and Father didn't like it," was all he would say.

He left the house at once afoot with a book under his arm. It was little more than a mile into Greensburg, and he felt like walking. He wanted to think as he went along, and to stop now

and then on the quiet road and reread certain marked passages of the book before discussing them with Uncle Andy.

In a sense it was Uncle Andy himself who was responsible for the hot turbulence of his heart at this moment. A few weeks ago he had looked up from his desk at Ranald one evening and said:

"How old are you now, son?"

"Seventeen."

"H'm! That's about the right age to read Ruskin. Know anything about him?"

"I'm afraid not."

Uncle Andy had untwisted his long thin legs and gone over to a bookcase. From it he selected one of a set of shabby brown volumes.

"*'The Mystery of Life and Its Arts,'*" he had read. "Start on this one. At first it will make you want to set out and reform the world. Then it will end by reforming your own prose style. Come back and get another when you've finished this. That is, if you like it."

Ranald had accepted it courteously out of respect to McKelvey and laid it on his table at home and forgotten it. He picked it up at last from a sense of duty and started the finely written pages casually. Then something happened. At first it was the mighty rhythm of the sentences that caught his creative ear and claimed it. Then slowly, up from the sensual satisfaction of the prose there arose for him a food for the spirit for which he found he was hungry. Here was the meaning for strange moods he himself had known. Here was an interpretation for the mystery of life that lay all around him as yet untouched by his eager fingers; here was a call and a challenge! From what he had said, Uncle Andy must have felt it once and then forgotten it. But he, Ranald, would never forget, now that he had felt it. Never!

For, most of all, the slender little volume had wakened him to a new knowledge and a new doubt concerning what he had always before considered the secure and infallible workings of a

competent world. He had marked certain passages then as he read it. Now they seemed to him to be written in scarlet across the sky.

He paused in his walk and opened the book.

Six thousand years of weaving [Ruskin demanded with his merciless Scotch logic], and have we learned to weave? Might not every naked wall have been purple with tapestry, and every feeble breast fenced with sweet colours from the cold? What have we done? Our fingers are too few, it seems, to twist together some poor covering for our bodies. We set our streams to work for us, and choke the air with fire to turn our spinning wheels—and, are we yet clothed? Are not the streets of the capitals of Europe foul with sale of cast clouts and rotten rags? Is not the beauty of your sweet children left in wretchedness of disgrace, while, with better honour, nature clothes the brood of the bird in its nest and the suckling of the wolf in her den?

But to Ranald it was something like a portent that he had twice underlined the other passage before he had even thought of remaking the Magnus patch:

Lastly, take the Art of Building . . . and in six thousand years of building, what have we done? . . . The ant and the moth have cells for each of their young, but our little ones lie in festering heaps, in homes that consume them like graves; and night by night, from the corners of our streets rises up the cry of the homeless. . . . Must it be always thus?

"Must it be?" Ranald repeated to himself fiercely, his young, sensitive face smitten with feeling. Must all the plans which that very afternoon had leaped in strength of purpose to his mind be thwarted because his father was cruelly arbitrary and unfeeling?

Never except in his love for Cynthia and in his poetry had he known such joy as he had felt when he visualized the new patch that he himself would create. The freshly painted houses, all different colors; the new adequate porches; the trees; the building of a row of larger houses so that there would no longer be

eight and ten people living in four little rooms with beds everywhere, even in the kitchen! He saw the new patch rise from the valley like a glorified dream. After all, it was the miners down in the bowels of the earth digging the coal, and the sweating Poles and Magyars drawing coke in the yards that made the money for MacTay & Company, wasn't it? Then why could his father not see that it was right to make them more comfortable and to look after their families? And it would take so relatively little money to do it.

He reached the town and paused at the familiar hill where he had played as a small boy. His first intention of going to see Uncle Andy—who, whatever his own opinion might be, would at least listen to all the evidence with dispassionate interest—had broken down as usual under the longing to see Cynthia again and pour out to her the story of his day. Together they would read the book and discuss the marked passages. Together they would consider how perhaps the great plan could yet be carried out. With a quick promise to himself to visit Uncle Andy for sure on Sunday, if he did not get out to the house, Ranald started along the hilly street.

His friendship with Cynthia was the other secret which he and his mother united in keeping from Alex. In the first years it had been such a small and casual thing there was no need for subterfuge. They were in the same room at school; they lived on the same hill, and so they walked home often together; they teased each other, quarreled, made up, sent valentines and attended each other's birthday parties. But a year ago the casualness of childhood had fallen from them both like an outgrown garment. Something terrifying in its strength struck Ranald, and sometimes looking into Cynthia's eyes he felt sure that the strange force had touched her also. But no word had been spoken of this, no caress given in token. The change showed itself outwardly in the fact that Ranald now went, with some hesitancy, but with ever increasing frequency to the Rockwell home. This hesitancy was not caused by fear of his father's dis-

pleasure. It was because he was always disturbingly conscious of Mr. Rockwell's drawn brows and distant manner and of the fact that, while Sally Rockwell was always pleasant in the light, easy, nervous way she had, she was not at her friendliest with him. He was sure of this once when he inadvertently saw her welcome to another boy. And yet he had to go, as long as Cynthia allowed him. Once in the downstairs writing room which she had converted into her own little study, he forgot Mr. Rockwell's brows and Mrs. Rockwell's consciously easy greeting. He forgot that his own father had once announced flatly that there were to be "no dealin's between the Rockwells an' the Mac-Tays." He was happy with a great, straining happiness that often sent him home with a longing which he tried to submerge, but which yet satisfied him with a deep delight of both senses and spirit. For Cynthia made one think of clear, rushing brooks in springtime and of naiads braiding their hair among the green sedges; she made one think of fairy rings under a midsummer moon and of thin pipings from shepherd lutes. There was an elfin quality in the dark delicacy of her face and in the quick movements of her tall, slim body, for Sally's bright animation had become etherealized in her last-born child.

As far as outward appearance went, it might have been the charm of opposites which had brought Ranald and Cynthia together; but that was not what held them. They each possessed a beautiful and lively fancy which made their communication with each other almost a language of its own.

Ranald made his way on up the street now, eager to reach her, to tell her all his new burden and hear her reaction to it. But when the Rockwell house came into view he was suddenly startled by its shabbiness. Probably because his mind at the moment was busy with the subject of "The Last and Greatest Art of Building," with thoughts of painting and repairs, he saw now to his amazement that the big house showed signs of neglect. Strange he had never noticed before that one shutter hung crooked, that a porch pillar was beginning to rot, that

there was broken slate on the roof of the imposing portecochere, and that the whole place needed paint.

Now since he saw this with conscious sight he began to recall that the inside of the house was shabby also. Everything elegant but noticeably worn. Always when he was there, Mrs. Rockwell's quick, proud manner and Cynthia's own gaiety made their mere surroundings seem unimportant. He wondered with deep uneasiness whether Mr. Rockwell was in any real financial trouble. He and Cynthia never talked about their fathers' business affairs. The truth was, they knew very little about them except that there was an old and bitter rivalry between the two men. Even this fact faded completely before the pressing immediacy of their own daily interests.

But now, sensitive as he was to all impressions, with an inherited awareness of what a coming moment might hold for him, Ranald opened the Rockwells' iron gate and went up the walk, fearful of something, he did not know what. The big pillared porch was empty, which was strange in itself, for there were usually people about. He stood at the door hesitating, and as he waited he heard from above the unmistakable sounds of a woman's hysterical weeping, broken now and then by a man's angry shout. He could distinguish no words, but his heart froze within him. Something was wrong then, just as he had curiously sensed. He set his lips firmly together and rang the bell. He must see Cynthia. He must know whether she was all right. If it was only a quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. Rockwell she would of course say nothing, and neither would he. If it was anything else . . .

No servant appeared, which struck Ranald with deeper fear. He rang again. After several minutes Cynthia herself came slowly down the stairs as though she did not quite see where she was going. When she reached the door Ranald saw that her own eyes were red and swollen from much weeping.

"Cynthia!" he cried, distressed.

She started as she saw who it was, and a strange expression

crossed her face. It was not exactly hate but it was very like it.

"Go away," she said. "Quickly. Father mustn't see you. Or Mother. Oh, go away as fast as you can!"

Ranald stood still. His voice when he spoke again had the firmness of a man's.

"I'm not going until you tell me what's wrong. Why mustn't your father or mother see me? Is the trouble something about—us?"

"You can't come in. Father might— He's clear beside himself."

"You can come out then. What about the arbor? No one can see us there. I have to talk to you, Cynthia."

The steady determination of his voice was not to be gainsaid.

"Go on out there, then," the girl said, trembling. "I'll meet you."

As she came, Ranald was smitten with the delicate fragileness of her body. Of what use would his strength ever be if not to protect it, to shield it from hurt? No storm must ever strike it, no hardship, no pain! Young, foolish thoughts of flying now with her to some far-away isle, where no tear would ever dim her eyes again, flashed through his mind as she came furtively toward him between the trees.

She stood, facing him, in the summer house, her dark eyes desperate.

"What is it?" he demanded. "I have to know everything, Cynthia."

"My father's ruined," she said. "He's lost everything: the works, all his money, even the house here. Everything's been mortgaged for years, and Mother never knew. He kept it from us, hoping he could still borrow more—and save himself. But he's been blocked! He's been driven into a corner! He's been hounded out of his business—out of everything!"

"Who's done this?" The question was torn from him. He had to ask it.

"You ought to know," she said.

"Was it my father?"

The girl's control broke entirely. "Yes, it was your father. And I don't care if he is your father. I hate him. I *hate him!* He's done this to us. He bought coal land he couldn't even use just to hurt us. He's schemed and worked to get ahead of us. And now, just today my father went to him to ask if he'd buy him out at a fair price—there's some coal left and all the mine equipment—"

"And wouldn't he?"

The girl looked suddenly like a young fury.

"No. He's too hard! He's too mean! He has no mercy. He saw Father was in his power completely, and he made him almost give him Rockwell; and Father couldn't help himself. He was caught. He had to sell, and your father knew it."

She sank down on the seat, shaken with weeping.

"Do you wonder I hate him?"

Ranald stood silent in his shame and despair, his strong hands clenched to the bone.

"The servants all went today," the girl went on. "There's to be a sale—even some of the furniture. I'm afraid it will kill Mother. I don't know where we'll live. But, wherever it is, you can't ever come. Not now. Not after all this."

He sat down beside her and spoke slowly out of the torture of his heart.

"I would die for you, Cynthia, if it would do any good."

She looked up into his face wonderingly and saw that he spoke the truth. She reached her hand slowly toward him.

"It's not your fault. I know. You mustn't think too much—you couldn't help it."

"I'll talk to Father tonight. I'll do everything I can; but," he ended sorrowfully, "nothing ever changes Father."

They parted quietly, her hand remaining a long moment in his. Then she went quickly back to the big house that had once reared itself in pride and now was to be sold in ignominy over

their heads. Ranald watched her until she had entered it; then he slipped hurriedly between the trees, through the familiar iron gate which had often closed with a joyful clang behind him. He fastened it softly now as one subdues sounds in the presence of the dead. He had left the town when he realized that he had forgotten "The Mystery of Life and Its Arts" on the bench of the summer house. He made himself return for it though every step was hard. When he entered the Rockwell yard again the house was closed and still. There were no sounds now of shouting nor of weeping. It was as though despair possessed it with its terrible silence.

The book which earlier in the evening had seemed to Ranald to be written in the scarlet ink of destiny now suddenly was silent to this new need. Ruskin seemed to have no words to cope with this disaster. Even the fate of the patch seemed of smaller moment now, compared to the tragedy of the Rockwells.

As he walked, he thought bitterly of his father. There had been times when the lack of understanding between them had hurt him like a dull unlocalized pain, but he had never felt resentment. Indeed he had up to this very day felt for him a vast, if far-off and reserved respect. Now, this afternoon, for the first time he had suspected his father of being a hard man; and because of the evening's revelations he was cruelly certain of it. It was as though all the emotion which through the years should normally have been vented in active love for his father was turned now to hate.

When he reached home the dusk still lingered. He could see that his father and mother were on the porch, and that Jack White was with them. He often stopped off between trains. Ordinarily this would have made him quicken his steps with pleasure, for Uncle Jack was his idol. Tonight even the prospect of an evening with him did not lighten the burden on his heart. They were all laughing as he went up the steps. He wondered

vaguely if he would ever laugh lightheartedly again, for now the weight of a new and cruel world pressed him down.

"Hello there, old top," Jack called out as he caught sight of him. "Say, this is good luck. I supposed you were out for the evening. What's wrong? Did she give you the gate tonight?"

Ranald could not answer, and they all saw then that he was white and trembling. Meggy hurried toward him.

"My dear, you're sick! Sit down. I'll—I'll get you something. Alex, maybe he did too much at the works today when he's not used to it."

Ranald pushed her gently aside and faced his father.

"Is it true," he asked in a voice that sounded thick and strange, "that Mr. Rockwell has failed, and that you've been trying to ruin him all these years and now today when he's driven into a corner and has to sell out to you you took advantage of him and made him just about give you what's left of the works? Is that true or isn't it?"

Alex had removed his pipe, staring incredulously at his son. Now he rose suddenly to his feet, his face flushed and angered.

"Who's been tellin' you all this?" he demanded.

Ranald's look did not waver.

"I heard it from Mr. Rockwell's daughter. They've lost everything. Their house is to be sold at public sale, and some of their furniture even—"

"No," Meggy cried. "Oh, not that! That can't be, Alex!"

"That's what you've driven them to," the boy went on fiercely. "If you'd even paid him a decent, fair price today for the works they could have saved something. Now everything's mortgaged, and it has to go. And you did it! You can't deny it! You brought this on them! You're cruel and—and hard and—merciless!"

There was a second of aghast silence, for Ranald's tone was one of furious disrespect.

Alex's reply was swift. His arm shot out toward his son but was as quickly recalled.

"Get on up to your room," he said, "an' stay there till you learn how to speak to your elders. An', once for all, I'm tellin' you this: I'll have no talk from you about how I run my business until you've learned something of what business means. Now, go on with you."

Ranald turned and went. He had meant to plead with his father, to see if he could by any chance soften him for Cynthia's sake. Now his anger had gotten the best of him. He had gained nothing beyond making a scene in front of his mother and Uncle Jack. Stricken with hopelessness, he started up the stairs.

Alex strode to the door and called after him: "There's one more thing. You keep away from the Rockwells. There's plenty other people in Greensburg to associate with. I've told you that before. This time, see that you mind it!"

Ranald did not reply.

Alex came back to his chair, but he did not sit down. He picked up his pipe and cap.

"I've got to send a few wires," he said stiffly. "I won't be gone long. You'll be here when I get back, White?"

"Oh, yes," Jack said lightly. "You'll have to endure me till midnight. My train goes then."

Alex said nothing to Meggy though her eyes met his, asking, accusing. He went down the steps, and in a few minutes drove away in the car.

When he was gone Meggy turned to Jack, her lips quivering.

"It must be true, or he would have denied it. Oh, this is too terrible! Things have been quiet now for several years. I thought Alex was satisfied at last to let Rockwell alone. I've been so relieved, for I thought the works there were just going on in a small, steady way. Now for them to lose everything, even the house— Oh, this is horrible! And Ranald feeling it so! It's his first real quarrel with his father, and now things will be so much worse—I mean difficult between them. I'm wretched over this, Jack."

Her voice was piteous.

"Is Ranald still fond of this Rockwell girl?"

"Yes. I'm fond of Cynthia, too. She's the only girl I've ever met that I felt I could love like my own. Of course, they're young yet. A thousand things may happen, but—"

"But you think on Ranald's part it may be the real thing?"

Meggy hesitated. "Yes," she said at last. "You see in some ways he's very much like his father."

Jack got up quickly. "Let's stroll across the lawn and get a breath of air," he suggested. "It will be good for both of us."

They walked slowly across the grass. The crickets were singing in the hedge. A thin bluish haze lay along the hills meeting the dusk and melting into it. The air was sweet with the early autumn fragrance which Meggy loved. Nature rested, satisfied in her fruitage, rich in her year's fulfillment. But here and there already a dried leaf fell; and no birds sang. Even in the crickets' tune there was the sadness of mortality.

Meggy spoke only once as they crossed the garden.

"I'm so unhappy," she said.

They stopped beside the stone wall and stood looking off over the countryside. As Alex had wished, the garden commanded a view of the coke ovens, all their ugliness lost by distance, only their crests of fire to be seen among the hills. Meggy stood silent, overborne by the heaviness of her own thoughts. For many years now Jack had seemed so like one of the family that she made no effort at conversation. She was thinking of Sally Rockwell and the bitterness of her present position; of Alex's relentless determination through the years to ruin them, and of this, the first sharp clash between Ranald and his father. This day upon which she had counted to bring the two together had in its mysterious hours separated them by a greater distance than ever. Perhaps an irreparable distance now. For Ranald, she knew, was fighting desperately not only for his young idealism but for the happiness of the girl he loved.

At last she became aware of the fact that Jack was unusually silent also. She looked up quickly and met his eyes fixed upon

her with a look in their depths of such profound meaning that she could not even pretend to misunderstand.

"Jack!" she cried, drawing back in dismay.

He tried to smile, but his eyes were dark with longing.

"It's been for a long time, Meggy. You never knew before?"

She shook her head, her own eyes full of their new misery.

"Oh, I can't bear this, Jack!"

"It must never give you pain. I shouldn't have let you see, but there's one thing I have to find out. I've no right to ask—and yet it gnaws away at me day and night. I've got to know."

"Of course," Meggy said brokenly. "Anything."

"Do you still love Alex?"

She raised her head, her eyes looking with their clear innocence into his.

"Yes. Always, Jack. I can't help it."

He rested his arms on the stone wall while the darkness fell slowly around them.

At last he spoke. "It's better that I should know that from your own lips. And I understand. He is your fate even as you are mine. We can't either of us help it."

"Oh, but you must!" Meggy cried, her voice trembling in her distress. "You are so fine, so dear! You must put this all out of your mind and find someone—"

He broke in. "It's of too long standing, Meggy. No, in all my life I've never followed a straight line except this. Don't ask me to be untrue to my one loyalty."

Then he added, very low, "After all, your gentleness is as much as many a woman's love."

The sadness of his voice seemed to break her heart, along with a fear that smote her not alone for herself but for Ranald and Alex.

"Then you'll not keep away—I mean now, after this? You'll still come here to the house as you always have?"

His voice was almost harsh.

"Yes. I'll still come. A strong man wouldn't. Alex wouldn't. But I'm a weakling. I'll come back and back to the flame that sears me."

Then, at an involuntary shrinking cry from her, he caught her hand in his. His tone was again the familiar one she knew so well.

"Forgive me!" he said. "That isn't true. You are not a flame, Meggy. You are like a star, beyond my reach but beautiful and shining. There!" He pointed to a golden speck in the evening sky. "That is what you are to me! Now let us forget all about it and go back to the house and see if we can't pull Ranald out of his young despair."

When they reached the porch he said, "Will Alex mind if I go up and talk to the boy?"

"No," Meggy answered. "Just now you'll do him more good than I could. Please go, if you will."

"And what shall I say to him?"

They looked at each other with the new knowledge between them.

"Shall I say that the goods of this world are but a passing show? '*Sic transit gloria mundi*,' and all that?"

"Yes," Meggy said with a catch in her breath, "yes, tell him that."

"But that love remaineth."

She bowed her head, without answering.

Suddenly he stooped and touched his lips to her forehead. When he straightened again—by what terrible effort of will she could only guess—he was his usual careless, debonair self.

"Alex will never miss that one!" he said with a light laugh. "Now, wish me luck in my role as guide and adviser to youth. Good night, Meggy. I'll keep Ranald company till train time. And don't worry about things. Remember, we all live for your smiles."

"Good night, Jack. Dear Jack!"

He ran whistling up the stairs. She could hear him pounding on Ranald's door, shouting bits of nonsense through the key-hole.

She stood in the darkness of the porch alone, shaken and bewildered. Jack White loved her. The incredible fact stood out from all the gay camaraderie of the years. Jack, with his quick understanding, his whimsical charm, his unfailing friendship. And she loved him with a deep and permanent affection. In a hundred small ways he knew her better than Alex did. She could never deceive him by feigned good spirits. At a glance he saw whether she was happy or sad. She had laughed more with him than with anyone else she had ever known. She had talked with him on more different subjects. His complete understanding of the boy, Ranald, threw into sharper relief the imperfect quality of Alex's own fatherhood. And yet even now, this very evening when Alex had again through the business brought her uneasiness and bitter distress, her own heart was not stormed and overcome by the knowledge of Jack's love. It was only sad with a tender and utter sadness for his pain.

What was this mystery? Of what illogical elements was it compounded? Why did she stand now, listening, waiting for the sound of Alex's returning wheels instead of sending the cry of her heart to that room above where Jack White, strong in his gay sacrificial pretense for her sake, was comforting her son? She pondered now as she often did upon the bond that knit her to Alex. How much of it was the shadow of the spirit? How much was the substance of the flesh? Could one ever know? Did Nature herself weigh and measure and reckon out her human alchemies? Or did she toss together two stranger souls—even as Alex and she herself had been tossed—and smile and withdraw forever after disinterested?

There was the distant sound of an approaching car—Alex driving hard as usual. In a few more minutes there would be his step on the walk, his strong figure mounting to the porch. At sight of her alone he would come quickly to her as he always

did, no matter how short his absence, for her kiss. Meggy leaned out into the darkness and looked up at the sky now filled with stars. Out of all the distress, the coming anxieties, the present confusion, one thing was still clear.

"Maybe it's just because I'm a good wife," she whispered, "or maybe it's because I'm really not a good woman at all; but always, always, I would give anything, even my soul, for his love."

Then suddenly her hand went to her breast, while the tears she had been holding back all evening filled her eyes. Her lips did not form the words, but her heart heard them.

"But not my boy, if that should ever be the price. Not my son."

CHAPTER XI

THE dramatic failure of E. B. Rockwell shook the town to its depths. There had long been a general feeling that he had been outdistanced, but while the works of late years employed fewer and fewer men, they still went on, a landmark on the countryside. Only two or three people knew a tragedy was impending, but even they did not realize the full extent of Rockwell's obligations. When the break came it was slowly discovered that he was in debt to everyone. For more than a year the very food they had eaten had not been paid for. Sally, proud, easy-going, jealous of her position, had entertained as she always had done. Even the sharp eyes of the women who went and came in the house were in large measure deceived by her bright chatter.

"Look at this room! Isn't it awful? I've got to do it over this fall, but I hate the tear-up! I'm getting awfully old or slack or something, for the very thought of decorators makes me weak. Another cup of tea?" So she had diverted them.

When the town knew not only that the Rockwell works were lost to him, but that the great house and some of its contents would fall into the hands of his creditors, it gasped with the shock. Sally Rockwell impoverished! Sally Rockwell's fine old furniture sold under the hammer! How could these things be?

And then, starting in the offices of bank presidents and lawyers, slowly gaining way in the drawing rooms and parlors, and reaching ultimately every small shopkeeper and housewife of the town there came the full story of the struggle between Rockwell and MacTay. The incident of the purchase of the key farm and the buying up of the extra coal land between Rockwell's holdings was all now recounted with certain small ugly rumors

added in connection with the sales. There was evidence to the effect that the lawyer, Hollister, had in several instances altered facts for the benefit of his client. The farmers were not all satisfied with their bargains, and their side of the story filtered in now to add to the rest. It was said quietly that Rockwell had not been on the whole fairly beaten! There was no end to the gossip, the speculation, the surmise; but the sympathies of the town were on the side of the losers. The women who long had been forced to accept Sally as a social arbiter now indulged in a new and delicious attitude of pity. "How are the mighty fallen!" was the summing up of the general sentiment abroad, while "poor Sally" was the concrete subject of every conversation.

The men seeing Rockwell come along the street, always these days a little less than sober, with bloodshot eyes and a look of bitterness, felt a genuine sympathy for him. MacTay, they said, had been after him for years. Clever fellow, MacTay, but hard as nails. Made old Rockwell stand and deliver at the end. Of course business was business, but it was pretty tough on Rockwell for MacTay to drive him into a corner and then take the very shirt off his back. Tough on the family, too. Boys all just had fair jobs. All scattered now; married, with their own families to keep. No help from them. Fine-looking girl, Cynthia, with Sally's spirit. Sort of a come-down for her. But she was young. Rockwell and Sally were the ones to be pitied most, of course.

On the day of the sale the friends of the Rockwells were divided, some feeling the least they could do was to help mount up the proceeds by attending the auction and purchasing all they could, and the others deeming it indecent to witness the shameful proceeding. It was known then that the Rockwells were going to live in a small, ordinary frame house not far from the business center. It seemed that Sally, not overstrong for years, had collapsed completely, and Cynthia and her father had to make all the arrangements. It was whispered that the moving of such furniture as would fit the small house had taken place after dark, so that only the near neighbors saw the transfer.

Through all that week Cynthia was absent from school, and Ranald suffered deeply: first and most of all for her own distress, but also from the attitude of the other students, who implied by their behavior that he was somehow responsible for the situation. Cynthia was one of the most popular girls in the town. She had all her mother's social gifts along with the charm of her own gay spirit, so that the big Rockwell house had been the rallying place for that favored group of young people who had been Cynthia's friends from her pinafore days on. Invitations had actually been out for another big party there when the great blow fell. Now her schoolmates gathered in groups in the halls or on the sidewalks to discuss the situation with grave faces. And while Ranald, too, had always been a favorite he knew that now in their eyes he was under a cloud because he was his father's son.

When Cynthia returned to school she looked tired and pale. She was more quiet than formerly though Ranald overheard her talking with attempted brightness to the girls in the hall.

"A little house is awfully convenient really, when you get used to it, and ever so much less trouble. If only Mother was better I wouldn't mind a thing!"

But Ranald watching her day by day knew that she did mind to the point of heartbreak. The burden of the whole disaster had fallen upon her, his beloved. For Sally remained weak and ailing as the weeks passed, and Cynthia had to be nurse as well as housekeeper, though untrained for both. He rarely saw her alone for more than a few moments, and then she talked swiftly of generalities and hurried away as though wishing to avoid him. After two months of this he was desperate. He went to Greensburg one evening and waited about until he saw Mr. Rockwell approach his favorite haunt. Even this choice was evidence of his complete humiliation, for it marked his descent from the town's best bar to its cheapest corner saloon. Having seen him enter, Ranald walked hurriedly toward the street where the modest frame house stood. He knew it well. Night after night

he had walked slowly back and forth in the darkness, watching for glimpses of Cynthia through the windows. But tonight he was going inside.

He rang the bell boldly, even while his heart beat fast with nervousness. After a while the door opened, and Sally Rockwell herself stood facing him. Her head was still high, but her dark eyes were unnaturally large because the cheeks seemed to fall away beneath them. Her hair was grayer, and her whole figure looked shrunken. But the old pride was still in her bearing, and Ranald honored her for it.

She looked at him now unsmilingly, and finally said, "I should think you would not have come here, Ranald."

"I had to, Mrs. Rockwell. Won't you please let me see Cynthia?"

She stood for a moment, hesitant, still unbending, still the great lady even in the narrow, cramped hallway. Then with neither friendliness nor hatred in her voice she said slowly: "You may go on through to the kitchen. You'll find her there."

Ranald thanked her and passed through the little dining room as she indicated. He had not dreamed even from the appearance of the outside that the house was so small. There was about it everywhere to his eyes the restricted look of poverty. He went on to the kitchen, where Cynthia was washing dishes at the sink. She looked up in amazement as he came toward her.

"I told you you were not to come here." Her voice was not angered, he decided, only anxious.

"I had to."

"But if Father should come—"

"He won't. Not for a while."

She looked at him quickly, then sighed.

"No. He's usually late these nights." Ranald picked up a tea towel, and they worked together without speaking. Through the open door he could see that Sally had thrown herself upon a couch in the dining room and lay now with her eyes closed, one thin hand shading them.

Cynthia noted his gaze and said in a low voice: "That's the biggest worry of all. She's so weak, and she won't have a doctor. I can see now that she hasn't been very well for a long time; but she always liked to be doing things—entertaining, you know, or going out. I think she suspected that the works were going badly, but she didn't want actually to know the truth. When it all happened, it was too much for her. Father's let go completely. It seems as if I had no one to hold on to."

He saw the slow tears run from her cheeks and felt a fury possess him that it should be so.

"You've got me, Cynthia," he said in a low voice. "I'll never give you up. If only I were older now, we might—"

He stopped, afraid he might have said too much.

"You mustn't talk like that. Your life's all planned. But—I might as well tell you. I'm going to quit school."

"Cynthia! You can't! You're first in the class! There's bound to be some way out."

She moved toward the dining-room door and closed it gently; then she sank down on a chair and wept unrestrainedly.

"I try to keep up for their sakes, but I have to let go some time. Don't mind me. It's just that I had planned so on college, and now everything in my life's changed."

Ranald felt impotent in his despair for her. He longed to put his arms about her, to hold her close to him; but as he approached her she drew away.

"I ought to tell you something. I hate your father. I hate him so that I can't go to sleep at night for thinking of it. I thought I ought to tell you."

"It doesn't make any difference."

"Yes, it does. It makes you seem different to me even though I try not to let it. I'm going to start to business school on Monday, and when I'm through I'll get a job as a stenographer."

"No," Ranald cried. "You shan't do that. I won't let you. Cynthia, listen! Uncle Andy wants to help you. He's got plenty, and no one of his own to spend it on. He knew your grand-

father so well, and he likes your mother. He told me he was coming to speak to you about it. You've got to let him do what he wants. Promise me you will. No one would ever know, and you surely wouldn't mind taking it from him."

Cynthia's dark face with its live beauty was raised to his. There was upon it a high-bred and obstinate pride.

"I can take money from no one but my father now or ever. You ought to know that," she said.

Ranald's face was hot with a slow mounting flush.

"You will take it some day from your husband," he said very low.

Her own cheeks flushed, but the scorn in her eyes did not lift.

"That depends," she said slowly and clearly as though feeling the weight of each word as it fell; "that depends upon whose money and what money it is. I think you'd better go now, Ranald. Please! I can't talk any more about it."

He went out the kitchen door and made his way blankly through the unfamiliar yard. As he was opening the gate he heard running steps behind him. Cynthia came through the darkness, and he felt her young fragrant body close to his.

"It isn't true that I really feel hard toward you. I couldn't let you go thinking that. I still—like you, Ranald."

Then she was gone before he could touch her.

The Rockwell disaster had been reflected in the MacTay household by more than Ranald's distraught face and silent manner. Meggy, too, was suffering from it, doubly as was her son. Her tender heart ached for Sally Rockwell and for the girl Cynthia. Besides this, she too felt the presence of a subtle condemnation of her family as she went and came on her social rounds. There was no outspoken comment. It was an expression here, a tone there, a whisper hastily covered, a conversation suddenly changed as she approached. Whatever her own feeling toward Alex's business had been, this was the first time there had been the least hint of a critical attitude on the part of outsiders. Her position now was too assured for the gossip to affect

her social life; but she felt the moving undercurrent, and her sensitive spirit was sore from it. She had demanded of Alex that he tell her the whole story that September night after Jack White's midnight train had roared away through the tunnel, and the light had gone out in Ranald's room. Alex had been tired and still irritated over his son's attack.

"There's nothing to be makin' all this fuss about," he said. "You know an' everybody else knows Rockwell's been goin' downhill for years. Now he's come to the bottom, an' it's nobody's fault but his own. I only did what any man with any gumption would do. I took advantage when it came to me. Now let's have no more talk about it."

"But when Rockwell came to you today to sell out, couldn't you have given him a fairer price? You had him then, you know, in your power."

Alex's eyes suddenly shone with a hard, cold light.

"Aye. I had him at last where I've been long wantin' him. Business dealin's are not for women, Meggy. You just let me run my own affairs."

Beyond this he would not discuss the subject. When they were settled for the night, however, Meggy spoke again.

"This touches me too, Alex, and you could see tonight how it hurt Ranald," she said.

Alex's voice for the moment was angry.

"He made a fool of himself, but I'm goin' to see to it it don't happen again. Is he sweet on that Rockwell girl?"

"They've always been friends."

"Well, there's plenty more girls in the town. He's to keep away from her. If there's bad blood between us an' them, the best way's to keep clear of them. Now let's be gettin' to sleep. It's late."

Meggy knew that he had called Ranald into the library the next morning before he went to work. The boy had emerged with his eyes stormy and his lips set. She said nothing to either though she guessed what had transpired. Now with the passing

weeks she watched her son with a greater anxiety than usual, for he was restless and bitterly unhappy. He was working hard, however, not only at school but at the Magnus each Saturday. Alex spoke to her with some satisfaction regarding that.

"He just needed a good talkin' to," he said confidently. "I doubt I've been too easy on him. He'll get shed of all his notions as he gets older. Pat says he's quick enough in the up-take."

"Does he ever go into— I think he was interested in the patch, wasn't he?"

"I stopped that. He's got no business there. No, it's the mine he's learnin', the same as I did."

And Meggy said nothing about the diagram she had seen on Ranald's desk with its carefully drawn houses, row on row. The boy's idealistic dream of improvements was not then entirely crushed. But she kept her own counsel.

When she asked about Cynthia she found him for the first time shy and pained and reluctant to speak of her. He did tell her that Cynthia was going to business college and that Mrs. Rockwell was not strong; that the Rockwell sons came back frequently and did what they could, but that they were located at a distance with their own families to support. They had never really seemed like brothers to Cynthia, for they had been almost college age when she was born. It was upon her, Ranald reiterated, that the burden all fell, and he was afraid it was even worse than they knew.

"Could we not do something for her without her knowing it?" Meggy asked.

"She'd find out and be hurt worse than ever," Ranald said decidedly. "They're terribly proud, you know. Especially where we're concerned."

And his mother sadly agreed.

In November Meggy noticed that once again Alex's eyes looked far away above his pipe even as he sat at home in the evenings. A peculiarly fixed expression settled upon his lips. His

whole bearing grew tense. She knew the symptoms all too well. Some new project had laid hold of him! She knew now that this was a part of his nature; that he could never rest satisfied or content; that he must be pushing on to a new goal, always attempting the impossible and conquering it. This she understood now with a still, quiet acceptance. So she waited until he would tell her what the new plan was. When the explanation came, however, she was like an unprepared city, suddenly besieged by the enemy.

It was golden Indian summer weather in mid-November, and Meggy had been planning to go to the farm for a few days when Alex surprised her one night by suggesting the trip himself.

"I want to be lookin' over the old place an' havin' a talk with your father. I think I've got a fine proposition to put up to him."

"To put up to Father?" Meggy asked, amazed.

"Yes. You see now I've got the old Rockwell works it would be possible to run a spur of railroad out from there to the farm an' start gettin' at the coal. That's what I've been waitin' for all these years. I mind one night, Meggy—just when I found I was out of that squeeze after the panic—I rode out to the hill here back of the house, an' I pictured to myself a whole ring of coke ovens, all of them the MacTay works. Well, I think now before long it'll come true."

"But you said once you'd never take—the farm!"

"That was before I built you this house. You've got plenty land of your own now. I'll buy you more here if you want it. Another farm." He paused and smiled. "I doubt your father'll open his eyes when I name a price to him."

Meggy could not speak. She only watched him as he went on.

"Your father an' mother aren't so young any more. If I buy up their coal it would put them on easy street the rest of their lives. Will you come out along tomorrow afternoon an' we'll put it up to them?"

Meggy did not sleep that night. She lay beside Alex as still

as death. He was after the farm, and he would get it as he had gotten everything else. There would be reared some day in the wheat field a monstrous tippie; great piles of black refuse would defile the orchard and the brook; across the meadow would stretch the belching coke ovens; yawning holes would deface and desecrate the rolling hills. And she would be homeless, desolate in a way Alex would never understand. She had drawn strength for the years from the farm. She would be lost, weakened, impoverished without it. Ranauld would be the poorer, too. All his summers since he was a small boy he had spent there, working in the fields, reading his books under the orchard trees, going early to bed in the little room where Alex had once slept, to be wakened by the sun; gaining strong, hard muscles and a healthy mind from the steady, peaceful routine of the days. He too loved the farm deeply. Like herself he would be unable to picture life without it.

If it were only Alex now with whom she had to deal, she knew what she would do. She would beg him, beseech him to let the farm alone. She knew his strength and the force of his ambition. This that he now planned had been long apparently in his mind. And yet she felt the hope within her that if she once put forth the whole weight of her pleading, of her desire, against him that he would accede to her wishes. She had never put this completely to the test. Whether she would really have the courage to do it, she was not sure. Now, however, intentionally or unintentionally, he had disarmed her at the beginning. She must also consider her father and mother. They were getting on in years, the farm was running slack as always. She kept all their wants supplied by quietly slipping money to her mother each time she was there. But after that dreadful night when Bill and Alex had had their quarrel, years ago, her father had seemed loath to accept help from them. Selling the coal would be different. The money then would be his own. He would be independent for the rest of his life. She could not be sure of her mother's attitude in the matter; but until they had

come to their own decision, she must keep silent and let events take their course.

She was pale as she rose and dressed the next morning. Alex, after a good night's sleep, was cheerful and ready for the day's developments. He spent the morning in his Greensburg office, and in the afternoon drove the car himself along the road they had so often traveled. As they passed through Rockwell he explained to her how the possession of the old works there with its branch railroad would enable him to reach out for the coal that lay in the old farm, in the Dennims' and the Houstons'.

"Your farm's the key one. When we have it I think I can get hold of the others all right. But it's the one I'll have to go through to get the rest. I'm goin' to make your father a good offer. I think we'll surprise him."

She could see he was genuinely pleased at the thought. He talked more freely than usual about the old days, even about Dennim and how he would need to use strategy to approach him.

"It's the money that talks, though, Meggy. I'm fixed now so I can make them fair offers. I don't look for any trouble."

They found Bill in the kitchen with Tirzah for one of his frequent rest periods, and so after the first surprised greetings Alex, as was his wont, went straight to the point.

"Mr. Parkinson," he said, "I've just lately bought the Rockwell works. I can get down now easy to this vein round here. I came out today to make you an offer for your coal. I'll pay you \$35,000 for it. What do you say?"

Bill let the forelegs of his chair settle to the floor with a clatter. Tirzah stopped stone-still at her work.

"My gosh, Alex!" was all Bill could utter.

"Cash, if you want it," Alex added.

Bill ran a gnarled hand over his thin gray hair.

"Thirty-five thousand! My gosh, Mother, looks like we're goin' to get rich at last!"

"It's just the coal I want," Alex continued. "You can reserve

enough under the buildings to live on here if you want, only I'd advise you to move to town—New Salem, maybe. The coal's so near the surface here, we'll strip it."

Involuntarily a cry broke from Meggy.

"Strip it! Oh, Alex, not that! Don't do that to the farm!"

Bill turned his faded blue eyes upon her—keen old eyes full of a strange, shrewd wisdom. He glanced only a moment at her white face, but it was enough.

"That's right," he drawled. "Strippin' it will certainly make the old place look like hell had run over it. Guess if we sell we'd better go to town. Well, what do you think about it all, Mother?"

Tirzah slowly plaited folds in her gingham apron. Even now in this strange emergency her face was calm.

"Well," she said slowly, "I'll leave the deciding vote to you, Bill. The farm's in your name, since Mother's gone. With me, now, it's like this. We're getting on in years, and it would be nice to be fixed so's we could move to New Salem and be near the church and the stores and have close neighbors and all. On the other hand I was born in this house and lived all my life in it, and I'm sort of old to make a change now. So, either way, you see, I'd be satisfied. Go or stay, is all right with me. Just you settle it, Bill."

"That's good, Mrs. Parkinson," Alex broke in. "Then I guess we can close the deal. I'll give you a hundred dollars hand money today, and we'll get McKelvey to draw up the deed—"

"Just a minute," Bill interrupted. "Don't be gettin' us all signed up so fast. I got to think things over first."

"Think what over?" Alex asked sharply. "Isn't the price good enough for you?"

"Oh, sure," Bill agreed, "sure. The price ain't bad. Ain't bad at all. Only I jist got to sort of study over it by myself. I'm goin' out to the orchard now. I'm pickin' apples, an' I'll be studyin' over it for mebbe half an hour or so. Then you can come out, Alex, an' I'll tell you what's what."

Alex smiled. This was evidently one of Bill's little jokes.

"All right," he said. "I'll be out in half an hour."

Bill moved slowly across the kitchen. He looked at Tirzah's calm face and knew she had spoken the truth. Either way, she would be content. That was her nature. He did not look at Meggy again. He walked along the path to the orchard, limping a little from his rheumatism, swearing softly and steadily under his breath. There was even a moisture in his eyes that did not belong there, and an uncomfortable thumping to his heart.

Thirty-five thousand dollars. A fortune for them at their age. He saw himself settled in New Salem, a man of substance, a man to be looked up to. He would go down the street to the post office or the store and sit as long as he liked in the barber shop. Damned if he wouldn't get himself an automobile and drive up to the Zimmerman House in Greensburg and pay O. P. Berger's bill! Every damned cent of it. They'd be glad enough to have him back to sit in the lobby then! Parkinson had struck it rich, they would all say. Sold his coal. Got plenty salted away now, had Parkinson! He could hear the familiar disjointed rhythm of the men's talk. About *him*. For he would be somebody at last. All this, more than he could ever have dreamed of, was within his grasp. He had only to say, "All right, Alex, go ahead," and it would all come true as gospel.

But there was Meggy. In that one glance he had read her heart. He sat down under the apple tree feeling as he thought a woman might feel in travail. The struggle within him seemed to partake of definite physical pain, as though all his members were being wrenched and torn by his indecision.

She loved the farm. She always looked a little peaked and older like when she first came. Then after a few days she would be singing and running up and down the path to the spring the way she used to do. She always had been a great one for the country—always following him round in the fields from the time she was a little thing in pigtails.

Bill heaved a heavy sigh. She'd married rich all right, but he

often wondered . . . She'd had her ups and downs with Alex. Plenty of them, or he was a Chinese. And she didn't like the big barracks they lived in now any more than he did. Fact. He knew it. And she'd always go over every foot of the farm when she'd come out, and her cheeks would get pinker; and she'd say: "Oh, isn't the old place lovely! I had to see the new wheat," she'd say. Or, "I just felt I must be here for the harvesting!" Or, "I couldn't miss cider making," she'd say. "I love the farm so, in the fall."

Bill let his head sink in his hands. All too well he could picture what the old fields would look like when the coal was "stripped." But thirty-five thousand dollars! His own money on an honest sale. Never again would he be beholden to anybody, especially to Alex. Never again would he be sort of a cipher at the wrong side. He'd be looked up to, rich, respected at last.

It did not seem a half-hour, but he saw that Alex was coming toward him along the path, walking quickly, confidently, his broad shoulders showing strongly in his well tailored suit, his handsome head held high above them. There was in his very stride a showing of assurance and of power.

In the flash of the moment Bill's mind was made up.

"He's got everything he ever went after up till now," Bill muttered. "Durned if he hasn't! Up till now."

Alex came on, and Bill got up from his seat on the ground.

"Well, I've been walking around the fields," Alex began. "The old coal bank's caved in, I see, but I guess we can do bigger business now—that right?" There was still the same confident note in his voice.

Bill shifted his tobacco to the other cheek.

"I been studyin' it over," he said, "an' I ain't sellin'."

Alex's whole body suddenly grew tense. "What's that?"

"I ain't sellin'."

"You're crazy, man. I made you a fine offer. Is it because you're wantin' more money?"

Bill shook his head. "Nope. I jist don't care to sell."

"You can't mean that. Think how well fixed you'd be for the rest of your life. You'd never have to do another stroke of work as long as you lived!"

Bill winced at that, but he only repeated, "I ain't interested."

Alex came close to him.

"Look you," he said. "If you keep still about it so the neighbors don't know, I'll give you forty thousand."

Bill's tobacco quid was still for a moment in his mouth; then he shook his head again.

"Ain't interested."

Alex's face was hot.

"There's no fight in you," he shouted. "Get your guts workin', man, and name your price then, an' let's get on with the deal."

Bill slowly straightened his narrow, stooped shoulders. His blue working shirt was patched, his dirty black trousers hung from worn suspenders; his face was not lately shaven, and his hands were knotty and soiled from his work. But he stood before his son-in-law more of a man than he had ever been in his life.

"Alex," he pronounced slowly, "if you've got ears an' can understand the language of the country, suppose you listen to me an' then get the hell on out of here so's I can finish my apple pickin'. I ain't sellin' this coal, an' I ain't sellin' this farm, an' you hain't got money enough to buy it. Them's my last words on the subject, an' you can like 'em or lump 'em."

Alex stood looking at the man before him, dazed with amazement and anger, dumb before an unprecedented situation. His customary strong sense of domination for the moment forsook him. He had wrestled with men and with forces triumphantly for so many years that a sudden and complete business defeat even in high places was to him incredible. To meet it here, now, in the old orchard from Bill Parkinson seemed impossible, fantastic! He looked bewildered, and Bill, watching him, chewed again and spat largely upon the ground.

"Now look here, Mr. Parkinson," Alex began, the faint supe-

riority which Bill always sensed now gone entirely from his voice. "You can't be serious. You haven't thought this thing through. You don't know—"

"I know jist what I'm doin' an' why I'm doin' it, an' you might as well try to milk a he-goat in a sieve as change me. There's jist one little thing you don't seem to have come up against, Alex, an' that's a fellow that can make up his mind as hard as you can yourself. Well—guess I'd better be gettin' back to work. So long, Alex. Come out whenever you can. Al'ays glad to see you at the old place."

Alex turned without another word and slowly retraced his steps toward the house. To Bill his shoulders did not look quite so broad nor his bearing so assured as when he had come out. Bill watched him, the man of power who had never before been blocked, taking his frustrated and incredulous way back.

Bill's faded blue eyes twinkled. A slow, complacent grin overspread his face.

"I beat him!" he muttered. "I beat him! Dad burn my old gizzard if these here last fifteen minutes wasn't worth the money!"

He looked across at his familiar hills, then back to the orchard where the one tree of late winter apples remained to be picked. He drew a long sigh of relinquishment for what might have been; then, gathering up his basket, he started with something like a rheumatic jauntiness across the thick grass between the trees.

When Alex reentered the kitchen Meggy knew something was wrong, for his expression was strained and angry.

"Well," Tirzah said anxiously, "what did he decide?"

"He won't sell," Alex said shortly.

Meggy sank down on a chair, great waves of thankfulness breaking over her. She had keyed herself up to a courageous acceptance of what she deemed was the inevitable. Now she felt limp and faint from relief. The farm was saved for her and for Ranauld and, some day, for his children. The beautiful old fields

and woodland undestroyed; the brook in the pasture meadow undefiled; the house she loved, the orchard, the spring—all saved—saved . . .

Tirzah was speaking quietly.

"I guess I'm really better satisfied to stay," she said. "Of course it would have been nice to be in town, convenient to church and the stores; but after all I'm not one to make changes easily. I think I'm better pleased just to stay on and not sell." She moved about her work. "Money isn't everything," she added.

Alex declined to remain for supper, telling Tirzah he must get back. Meggy decided quickly to go with him.

"I'll be out soon again, Mother," she promised. "Tell Father good-bye for me."

They did not speak as they rode along until they were passing the cornfield. Then Meggy touched her husband's arm.

"Stop a minute, Alex, please. I want to hear something."

He stopped the car, and she got out, running up the little bank beside the road. She leaned on the rail fence listening, a smile touching her lips. What she heard was the peculiar soft, sharp, whispering, chattering rustle of the wind in the November corn shocks.

She came back to the car finally, still smiling.

"There's no other sound in the world like that," she explained to Alex. "It says, 'Summer's gone, summer's gone, summer's gone.' You can almost hear the words. And yet it isn't a sad sound. It's very sweet."

"You're glad he won't sell the farm," Alex said suddenly, making no move to start the car. "I was watchin' your face just now. You're glad, aren't you?" His voice was almost accusing.

"Yes. I can't say how glad."

"Why didn't you tell me before how you felt?"

"Would it have made any difference?"

He did not answer at once.

"Would it, Alex?"

For a moment she felt as though her very life hung upon his answer.

"Suppose," she went on as though to set the issue more clearly before him, "suppose I had told you that, even with our big house and all the land there, nothing could ever take the place of the farm to me. Nothing could ever comfort me for losing it. Suppose I had begged you for my happiness to give up your new plan, would you have done it?"

And still there was silence. The doubt had lain so long in her heart that she felt bare and shivering and defenseless now that it was exposed. Something stronger than her own will had caused her to say this thing; to put into words this deep buried question. She glanced at Alex's face. It was set as it was when he was considering deeply. She had seen the same expression upon it when he sat in the parlor of the little brick house waging warfare against the problems that assailed him. She felt she knew what he was doing now. He would offer her no light answer. With his direct logical mind, trained by years of making important decisions, he was going over the whole matter as she had presented it to him.

"You can tell me the truth," she said quietly.

At last he spoke.

"You've put me in a hard spot, Meggy. I had to be considerin' before I answered you. I've planned this development in the back of my mind for years now, but I can honestly say this: If you'd told me you'd be aye grievin' for the farm—if I'd really known that, I think I'd have given it up. I think I would."

Meggy's head suddenly dropped upon his shoulder. His arms gathered her close. For a long time they sat there like young lovers. The delicate fire that had once run in Meggy's veins seemed to return to her as she yielded to his strong, passionate embrace.

"I'm happy today, Alex," she kept repeating. "I'm so happy today!"

"Aren't you happy every day?" he asked in surprise.

She only smiled and kissed him again for answer.

There was a dull gold sunset behind the trees as they drove on at last. Caught in the fretted crotch of an oak near the road, a squirrel's nest hung, perilously high and yet secure. Meggy watched it, thinking it was like her own life.

The happy glow of her heart's new certainty seemed to color the months of that winter. Her tension over Ranald and his problems relaxed somewhat, for he began suddenly to be cheerful again. Meggy knew that he was now meeting Cynthia regularly in—of all places—McKelvey's office. Uncle Andy had gotten round the proud girl by engaging her in advance as his secretary. He was eighty-two now, and while he complained with bitter humor of the infirmities of age, he was as keen in mind as ever. The fact that he did actually need help in his office, however, and put the matter up to Cynthia in the strategic manner of which he was master, had won her acceptance of the offer. She would help him two nights a week until she had finished her business course and then work for him regularly. The fact that Ranald dropped in at the office on the nights she was there did not seem unusual to any of them. Occasionally McKelvey found it necessary to speak to a colleague across the hall and left the young people to themselves. But even his presence did not represent a bar to their delight in being together. Ranald brought the shabby brown volume with him one evening, and they all discussed "The Mystery of Life and Its Arts." McKelvey listened to Ranald's impassioned story of his plan for remodeling the patch and how it had been blocked. He stroked his bony chin, and missed nothing of the boy's blazing eyes and the look of half-wonder on the girl's face.

"But don't you think I'm right, Uncle Andy?" Ranald burst out. "Don't you think yourself it ought to be done?"

"The world's full of things that ought to be done, my son," McKelvey answered calmly.

"I know it. With no one to do them! But here I am, *wanting* to do this. And we've got the money to pay for it. Why, com-

pared to some of Father's ventures it would cost hardly anything. And yet I'm stopped. It's not fair. The whole scheme of things isn't fair."

McKelvey nodded. "I've thought that once or twice myself in my lifetime."

Ranald eyed him sharply. He was not sure whether Uncle Andy was entirely on his side or not.

"Well, what would you advise me to do about it?" he asked with some bitterness.

"Oh, go on considering the mystery of life and its arts. That'll keep you busy for some time."

"I've read the book twice already."

"Do a little thinking of your own then. And don't get too wrought up over the state of the world. It's bound to clear up." He chuckled. "That's what the devil said to Noah, but never mind. It's good advice anyway. And meantime, Ranald, do what your father says. It won't hurt you to know something about the mining business."

Ranald made a wry face, but he did not reply.

As he was walking slowly home with Cynthia later she surprised him by taking his arm. Even before she spoke she seemed closer to him in spirit than she had been for a long time.

"I'm glad you told me about what you wanted to do in the patch, Ranald. It's done something to me. I couldn't ever explain it to anyone but you, but I think you'll understand."

"You know I will."

"Well, you see," she began, struggling for the words, "I still feel very bitter toward—toward certain people; and that made me feel sort of self-righteous myself. I felt as if we—we Rockwells were so much better and nobler than—certain other people. But here I've driven through our patch hundreds of times, and I never once thought about doing anything for the miners; but you thought of it!"

Her voice to Ranald's ear was unbearably sweet with its faint note of triumph for his sake.

"I don't mean," she went on hastily, "that I feel any differently about—a certain person. But it does seem to make it easier to feel that you aren't—to be sure you are— Oh, I just mean I'm glad you *did* think of it, Ranald."

The tangled words ran in his brain like a melody as he went back home. Something of pain was miraculously eased in his own heart; something of release came to his mind. He found himself again, as the days passed, beginning to play with sentences and phrases. He had not been able to do this since the Rockwell trouble. Now his return to his usual habit was evidenced not only by his more cheerful demeanor but by a slight lapse in his schoolwork. Alex took note of this at once.

"Mind this is your last year," he said seriously. "If you want college you've got to work for it. You could do as well without it, I dare say. I had no college, an' I've never missed it."

"But I do want it, Father. Very much."

"See you're ready for it, then."

One Saturday morning when Alex was in the office in Greensburg, he was surprised by a visit from McKelvey. Usually the calls went the other way.

"I stopped in to show you something, Alex," he began seriously. "Something I think you ought to see."

With a long thin forefinger and thumb he fished a bit of folded paper from his vest pocket.

"I know you've never taken any stock in Ranald's scribbling propensity, and in a way I can understand why. A little out of your line, of course. But you have to face facts when you come up to them. That boy's got a talent. Take a look at this."

He handed the square of paper over. Alex took it, saw the lines were printed and glanced up in surprise.

"What's this out of?"

"Their school paper. Ranald's the editor this year."

"Oh, he is, eh? That's why his work's been fallin' off then. I warned him well of it."

McKelvey made no reply as Alex hastily scanned the paper.

Never since that night years ago when Meggy with her shining face had given him Ranald's first childish rhyme to read had he seen any of his son's work. McKelvey had often cautiously attempted to discuss it with him, but Alex always quickly changed the subject; and for a long time Meggy had not mentioned it at all.

The words before him now drew him irresistibly. He read them again. All that the boy had felt, all that he had suffered from the beauty he was attempting to describe, was held fast in the chaste and disciplined loveliness of these few lines. Alex knew in the second of reading them what an accomplishment was here; and a surge of envy rose within him so strong that he felt suffocated with it. A craving rent him to feel again the old exultation, the transport, the pain, and then the power to capture it all and give it form and permanence.

But the power had departed from him.

He handed the paper back to McKelvey, who waited with a strange eagerness in his old eyes.

"It's not bad, I suppose," Alex said shortly.

"Not bad?" McKelvey echoed, as though stunned momentarily by Alex's reaction. Then he went on very earnestly.

"I've been a reader all my life, Alex. Words, words, words, for three-quarters of a century! And I tell you, by all I've read, good and bad, that this boy has an authentic gift. He's got—"

He broke off, and his face looked old as he watched Alex's unchanged countenance.

"I only wish he were my son," he ended slowly. "Don't you even want to keep this copy?"

"Aye," Alex said. "If you want to, you can leave it. And I thank you for your trouble. But I'd rather you wouldn't be encouragin' him in this verse-makin' business. It's not a man's work to begin with, an' besides he's got more important things ahead of him."

"Maybe so," McKelvey said slowly, "maybe so."

He laid the paper on the desk and turned to the door. "The

years will have to decide. Fortunately for all of us, Time is a lenient god."

When he was gone, Alex picked the paper up once more and studied the lines upon it. They spoke more to him than the words that composed them. He felt like a man who, having once turned a suppliant harshly from his door, sees him later return in majesty and power. For there was power here. He who rejoiced in strength and domination, who instinctively felt it or the lack of it in other men, recognized this. It was a hidden power, independent of the trade winds of chance or fortune, untouchable by the swordplay of industry or the shifting tides of the world's markets. And the boy had it.

Alex slowly tore the paper through and through and dropped it into the waste basket. It hurt him, therefore he thrust it aside just as he did certain memories. He refused to analyze the feeling that seemed to have caught him by the throat. He knew only that he did not want to see this fulfillment in the life of his son, this white marriage with beauty, this ultimate consummation which might once have been his own.

"He can put it behind him the same as I did, an' get on with the business. That's what he's to do, an' the sooner he learns it the better."

Then he turned to his desk, where a sheaf of letters awaited his inspection. Over one of them his heavy expression lightened. It was from Tiffany & Company of New York, and it stated that they could make up according to his description a gold bracelet set with diamonds. It would cost . . . Alex's eyes widened at the figure, and then he smiled. The more the better for this gift.

For a long time he had been baffled anew by the fact that it was difficult to spend money upon Meggy. "When I'm rich," he used to say to himself, "I'll get Meggy everything she wants!" Now that the money he had dreamed of was his, he discovered how simple her wants really were. She dressed well and enjoyed shopping like any woman, but she did not care for an over-extensive wardrobe. The new house had been furnished well at

the start. There was apparently nothing more to buy for it. And the expensive baubles that he had supposed every woman would crave if she could afford them, Meggy never asked for.

With her birthday approaching in April he had decided to buy for her one strikingly beautiful and expensive gift. Something that would make her eyes gleam with astonishment and delight; something that would cause other women, seeing it, to open their eyes too; something, in short, that would represent his ability now, after the years of struggle, to give her the best the world afforded. In Alex's mind, as he kept planning for it, this gift was to be a symbol. Vaguely he felt of late years that Meggy had certain dissatisfactions, if not sorrows, which she kept sealed in her heart. The confession of her feeling about the farm had convinced him that this was so. That scene had remained deeply imprinted upon his mind. For the first time in his life his desire and his purpose were at variance. The blocking of his plan had been a bitter disappointment to him. He still writhed under it. But would the achievement of it not have been more so, knowing Meggy's confession? The whole episode had caused him a certain uneasiness in his relations with her. Were there other secrets then, buried in her heart, which she had never told him?

He pondered on their years together: the deep satisfactions, the yielding sweetness both of her body and of her spirit. He had accepted all this with full assurance, as the natural way of love. Now, a disturbing doubt had crept in. He found himself watching her covertly as she sat reading or sewing under the evening lamp. He thought of the first time he had seen her with the sunlight on her hair; he remembered their first kiss, and the morning of their wedding day when she had clung to him sobbing that she hardly knew him!

It came over him like a chill mist that, from that day on, he had imposed his will upon her and she had yielded to it. He had never thought of it in this way before, and the knowledge left him in a new mood of uncertainty and something like fear.

Out of this had grown his determination to give her one beautiful and priceless gift, not only as an expression of his love but as a sort of justification of the years. He had settled at last upon a diamond bracelet, that should come from Tiffany's. He had never stopped to realize before how little jewelry Meggy wore: just the rings he had given her at the time of their marriage and the gold thistle pin at her throat.

Well, she'd soon have something worth wearing and no mistake. As he wrote the check now, the definite action calmed the uneasiness of his heart. He felt again a sense of mastery, of security.

It had grown to be an annual custom for McKelvey and Jack White to take dinner with the family on Meggy's birthday. Alex himself had arranged for this once years ago, and the habit had pleasantly persisted.

"You should both be married, you know," Meggy made a point of saying each year, looking affectionately at her guests; "then I wouldn't be one lone woman amongst all you men. Now see to it, that before another birthday you each find a wife!"

"To our future wives, Jack, God help them!" McKelvey always said, raising his glass.

"To our last year of freedom, Mr. McKelvey. Bachelor to benedict, before another April! That's the order!"

There was always plenty of nonsense and gaiety. Even Alex, on these occasions of special homage to Meggy, relaxed from his habitual seriousness, threw aside all care and laughed and joked with the rest. On this particular year the weather seemed to lead up auspiciously to the day itself. March had been warm and mild, and April came in with a burst of blossoms and bright skies above them. Alex's gift had arrived in good time. He kept it locked in the safe in the office, taking it out frequently to look at it. Even to him who had expected much for the price, the bracelet looked overwhelming. The diamonds blazed and sparkled as though they were live things.

"They're her birthstone an' all," he thought with satisfaction,

"an' it's not many men in these parts can give their wives a fairin' like that."

On the day itself he went home early, carrying the box in his pocket. The sight of the big house stirred him with pride as it always did. Today he had a feeling of stronger elation than usual as he drove up to the front door, where John met him to take the car. He went into the great hall with a quick step, and called, "Meggy! Meggy!" as he used to do in the little brick house in town.

She came at once, running down the stairs.

"Oh, Alex! I'm glad you're here before the rest. You must come and see the table. It's lovely! But Anna won't let me near the kitchen. I'm a perfect child about birthdays! I'm ashamed to like all this fuss over me so much. Uncle Andy sent me gloves by special messenger. Bless his heart! It's his one idea of a gift to a lady. I've called him up already to thank him. They're beauties, too. Long white French ones for evening. And Ranald was so sweet about the book he gave me—"

Alex interrupted her, smiling.

"Shut your eyes, now, an' hold out your hands."

She obeyed. "I really wasn't hinting, you know!" she said, laughing.

Alex removed the bracelet from its box and snapped it around her wrist. For a second he wondered if it might be a bit too heavy for her small hand. But the gleam of the jewels reassured him.

"There!" he said, standing back a pace to watch her.

She opened her eyes and looked from the bracelet to him and back again.

"Alex!" she gasped. "I've never seen anything so—so magnificent! I'm dazed over it! Oh, you shouldn't have done this!"

Alex beamed upon her proudly.

"An' why not? The best's none too good for you. Look you," he added, turning the bracelet around with his finger, "it's got fifteen stones in it. Tiffany's made it up for me."

She told him again how gorgeous it was, how incredible! "It must have cost a fortune!" she said with awe.

Alex was walking proudly about, his hands in his pockets, his head high.

"What if it did!" he said. "What if it did! Can't I spend my money on my wife if I want to? Isn't that what I've got it for?"

Like a sudden shadow on her heart Meggy thought of the Rockwells. The price of the bracelet might have turned the scales for them. Might at least have— But she must not think of that now.

"I can't thank you," she said with something almost like formality in her tone. "I simply can't tell you how beautiful it is or how wonderful you were to get it for me, Alex!"

While he was dressing he thought with a faint feeling of disappointment that she had not flung her arms around his neck in an abandon of joy, as he had hoped she might do. As she had done that one time!

"I doubt she's a bit cowed with the thing just at first. An' no wonder."

Uncle Andy as usual arrived on the dot of the dinner hour, though Jack, ordinarily early, had not yet turned up.

"He'll be here," Meggy said. "I had word from him. But it's unlike him to be late. I think he's been in Pittsburgh today, so he could get a train any time."

Just then Ranald called from the doorway with a laugh, "Here he comes. But look at him! What do you suppose he's bringing?"

They all hurried to the porch. Up the drive rolled the town express wagon with Jack standing on the step, waving his hat in profuse flourishes and evidently charming the old expressman with his extemporaneous remarks.

"Right here, Apollo. Stop your chariot right here! Delivery at the front entrance this time. Hello, everybody! Am I late for dinner? I couldn't come without my present, could I, and there

was a slight delay. Hey, Apollo, come round here and I'll help you."

In view of the group on the steps they began to unload from the wagon large heavy burlap bundles from which twigs and green leaves protruded. They set them against the steps, Jack dismissed the grinning expressman and then came up to Meggy.

"Happy birthday," he said. "Sorry I couldn't do my gift up in tissue paper! And it would be a bit awkward to put beside your plate at dinner, so I'm afraid you'll have to come down here to receive it!"

"It's something for my garden!" Meggy cried with delight.

"Now, now! Don't tell me you peeped! Guess what, then!"

A little flush of pleasure had overspread Meggy's face. She ran down the steps and stood with Jack fingering the green leaves.

"They're lilacs!" she cried again rapturously.

Jack struck a professorial pose, and said in a breath:

"Lilac or Pipe Tree, name given to shrubs belonging to the genus *Syringa*, order *Oleaceae*! Hardy, cultivated shrubs, flowers small with bell-shaped calyces, and tubular panicles—whatever *they* are! You can't tell me anything about lilacs, young woman. I've been reading up on 'em. Here, they've got tickets to show the different varieties."

Alex could see Meggy's eagerness as she bent to read the cards attached to the plants.

"Countess Josika—Hungarian lilac! Persian lilac! Common lilac—rose-colored! Common lilac—violet! . . . Oh, Jack, I'm so pleased! So delighted! I never knew there were so many kinds before! I simply can't wait to plant them! What a lovely, lovely thing for you to think of! Double white—Southern! French lilac . . . Where did you ever get them?"

"Oh, I ordered them from here and there. That double white came from Virginia. Wait till you get a whiff of it! That Persian has a—"

"I think we're called to dinner," Alex said suddenly.

"Of course," Meggy agreed. "I was too excited over my plants to notice. Whatever made you think of getting them, Jack? Oh, I love them!"

"Well," he said lightly, "I knew they were your favorite flower, and you said once you had never had enough of them!"

They went in to dinner, Meggy still joyously planning her garden and discussing the different species. Her whole face was alight with a spontaneous happiness, a radiant inner pleasure.

Alex watched her with something more bitter than anger in his soul. She had forgotten the bracelet.

"I'll plant the double-white ones at the dining-room window here," she was saying eagerly; "then I think I'll mass all the others along the south wall. All my life I've counted time to and from lilac season, and now I'll have—"

She stopped suddenly, meeting Alex's eye. Something in his look sent a hot wave of color, a painful flaming blush over her cheeks. If Alex had needed substantiation for his fear, her face at that moment would have given it. She began at once—too soon—to speak.

"Uncle Andy! Jack! You haven't seen my gift from Alex yet. Isn't it wonderful? Ranald, you haven't seen it either!"

She held up her wrist, and the bracelet flashed as she turned it.

They all exclaimed, commented, admired. But Meggy knew by Alex's face and the telltale realization within herself that the damage was done. She feared that Jack, too, had glimpsed the truth as it stood, for at once he began to exert himself to be unusually entertaining. Uncle Andy, who had seen nothing, went on telling his funniest stories by way of celebration. But Alex sat silent, and Meggy's heart was heavy. She could never explain to him, never make him understand. She could scarcely explain it to herself.

At the close of the dinner Uncle Andy looked up inquiringly.

"Well, Meggy, what about the usual charge to the bachelors? This is the first time you've ever let us off. How's that?"

Her eyes met Jack's in a strange look of shared knowledge. She was stricken by the reality, helpless to offer the bright rejoinder expected.

"Oh, she's given us up," Jack answered carelessly after a perceptible pause. "She's decided we're hopeless."

"She has, eh?" McKelvey echoed, a faint disappointment in his tone that his usual quip was to be omitted. "Well, we might surprise her yet."

But Alex had seen the look, seen it and felt it like a hot iron on his flesh. He knew as he rose from the table that he was trembling. He tried to steady himself, but he had no gift for dissembling. Through the remainder of the evening he sat, darkly silent, suffering as he had not done since that anguished night after his fight with Dennim.

Uncle Andy left early, and Jack, glancing often at Alex's face, insisted on leaving with him. John was to take them to their destinations in the car, and at the last moment Ranald decided to ride along.

When they were all gone, Meggy came back anxiously to Alex, who was standing in the big drawing room. She must do something, say something to break down this gray look on his face. She must somehow dispel this shadow that had hung over them ever since that moment at dinner when she had suddenly seen what was passing through his mind.

She summoned all her courage, all her bright resources. She went close to him, holding the bracelet once again to the light.

"It still seems, Alex, as if I can't find words to thank you for your wonderful gift."

The look in Alex's eyes did not change.

"You found them easy enough to thank White for his damned bushes," he said curtly.

Meggy stared at him helplessly, incredulously. But before she could attempt to answer, he caught her arms.

"What's between you an' him?" he said in a shaking voice.

"There's something. I saw it tonight. I've got to know."

"Why, there's—there's nothing, Alex," she stammered.

"Don't lie to me!" For the first time in all their married life Meggy heard the sternness of his tone directed toward herself. She released her arms from his hard grip.

"What there is to tell I would have told you before, only it didn't seem to be my own secret. Jack does—care for me. It's strange and unreal, but I guess it's true."

"How did you find this out?"

"He told me."

"When?"

"The night Ranauld came home with the news of Rockwell's failure. You remember you went back to town."

"And White made love to you while I was gone!"

"No, no. He only told me—he just asked me—"

"For God's sake tell me all that happened, Meggy, without mincin' words. I can't stand this."

Meggy raised her head with dignity and looked into his eyes.

"He asked me if I still loved you, and then he told me that he'd cared for me for a long time, but that we would never speak of it again; and he would come on to see us as he had always done."

Alex's face flamed.

"He did, did he? Comin' here to my house, eatin' at my table, an' all the while lookin' at my wife with lust in his eyes!"

"Oh, that's not true!"

"How can he help it," Alex said bluntly, "if he loves you!"

He was breathing hard, and his hands were clenched.

"If he wasn't man enough himself to keep out of the way after tellin' you that, I'll see to it now that he does. He'll never cross my door again."

Meggy's face was pale.

"After all the years of friendship, after all his kindness, you would do that to him?"

"I'll deal with him as I think best. But I'll not have him

lookin' at you the way he did tonight. Not here in my own house."

Meggy did not answer. She turned and went slowly upstairs to her room. She could hear Alex walking back and forth in the room below. She undressed slowly, put on her dressing gown, took down her hair, brushed and braided it. Then she sat down by the window. A little rain had begun to fall, a delicate April rain warm and steady and light. Meggy wished it were falling on her heart. There was such an ache in it, such a troubled weariness.

"Happy is the dead that the rain rains on."

The old line which Granny often used to quote came suddenly back to her mind. She sat there thinking of Granny and of little Tirzah. For the moment there seemed only the thinnest wall between them: a tenuous curtain, made of the soft spring air. She had the unaccountable feeling that if she closed her eyes and stilled this tired ache in her bosom she might slip through the misty veil and be with them.

Then all thoughts of death were dispelled by Alex's step on the stairs. The door of the bedroom was ajar, and so he pushed it open at once, closing it fast behind him. He strode across to where Meggy sat; and she could see that his face was still drawn with anger or pain, she could not tell which.

"Why did you leave me like that without a word and come up here?" he demanded.

"I don't really know why I did," Meggy said slowly. "I was just all at once so weary, so sad for all of us."

"But you must know it hasn't all been made right between us. You told me White asked you if you still loved me. But you didn't say how you answered him. I've got to know, Meggy. No matter which way, I'll have the truth. I'm not one for a fool's paradise."

"Alex!"

She rose and stood before him in amazement.

"My dear, my dear, I didn't even think it was necessary to

tell you what I answered. When he asked me I said, 'Yes. Always.' How could you ever doubt that?"

For an instant he seemed the weak, and Meggy the strong. He bent over her until his face was pressed against hers, and she felt that his cheek was wet.

"I've been in torment," he kept repeating, "torment, torment. I've never known the like before."

She checked him gently.

"Hush, Alex! Don't, darling, don't! I am all yours—have always been—will always be. Surely you know that."

Then suddenly she could feel all his strength again upon him as he caught her almost with violence into his arms.

When repose and silence were upon them at last, Meggy lay listening once more to the rain on the new leaves, with her ears open for another sound. Ranald was still out though John was long since back with the car. He was meeting Cynthia somewhere, she knew. Her heart kept turning over all the problems connected with him and his young love. In many ways, especially in this particular way, she felt that he would be like his father, passionately, implacably fixed in one great devotion. But how would it all end for him and for Cynthia? The pressure, the stress, the bitterness of life had fallen upon them too young. Had needlessly fallen upon them.

At last she heard him coming in, coming up the stairs, closing his own door softly. There was no sound then throughout the great house. Only the gentle lapping of the leaves outside the window, beneath the rain.

After one o'clock the showers ceased suddenly, and the full moon emerged clear and shining from the clouds. Meggy, still lying wakeful, saw the white-gold light stream through the window. It made the objects of the room stand out with a soft hesitancy from the darkness. She could see her bureau and dimly upon it the box into which she had put the diamond bracelet. She lay watching it, thinking. She saw Alex's proud face as he gave it to her; she saw Jack's as he drove up with his

load of lilacs: the gay kindliness of it; the dark restlessness of the eyes, the weakness of the mouth that had a tenderness in it like a woman's. She mourned for that face that was to be banished.

Then she saw her own as it must have been as she ran down the steps to receive his gift. In that moment of spontaneous happiness and in the ones that followed, she had all unconsciously given Alex a hurt that would be hard to heal.

Suddenly she got out of bed, went to the bureau and took the bracelet from its box. For a moment she held it up in the moonlight, a little sigh escaping her. Then she slipped it on and went quickly back to bed. The metal felt cold and hard and unaccustomed against her wrist as she kept turning restlessly, trying to shut out all the thoughts that pressed upon her. At last she reached for Alex's hand. Half awakened, he caught hers in his strong, warm clasp. Then, with the bracelet touching the flesh of both of them—then and only then, Meggy fell asleep.

CHAPTER XII

It was arranged during that summer of 1913 that Ranald was to enter Princeton in the fall. There had been some talk of Harvard but, while McKelvey tried to be impartial in setting forth the merits of the two institutions, it was clear from the start that he longed to see the boy walking the same old halls he himself had trod years before. Alex's attitude, in brief, was that college was college and, as long as he did his work when he got there, what difference did it make where he went!

Meggy said little either way, but when Ranald told her he had settled upon Princeton because it was nearer and he could get home more easily, she was touched and glad, even though she understood his remark perfectly when he added, "I don't want to be too far away just now."

In spite of dark moments when he realized how much he was going to miss the boy, McKelvey was jubilant over the decision, feeling it was entirely due to his own influence. He plied Ranald with old stories and good advice up to the very moment of departure. Then as the train pulled out of the station he stood on the platform with Meggy, waving his hat while Ranald leaned from the coach window calling a final good-bye.

Meggy, watching her son with all her heart in her eyes, found herself strangely noticing his hand as it grasped the window ledge. It was large and well formed like Alex's, with blond hair showing upon the back. Meggy was suddenly more moved by that hand than by his face, for it was the strong hand of a man.

The big house was still now all through the day, but it woke to Alex's vigorous inhabiting of it by evening. Meggy noticed a change in him, now that they were alone together. He was

lighter of spirits, more openly demonstrative in his affection, more talkative. It seemed, indeed, as though some deep inhibition had been removed from him. Business conditions, too, were fairly good. While Meggy knew that he still felt keenly the blocking of his plans for the old farm section, he was busy now with improvements at the steel plant.

He confessed to her, though, that there was something in the wind he did not altogether like, and could not explain.

"The last time I was in Philadelphia at Duncan's the old man told me he was feelin' the same thing. It's as if the whole system of business an' bankin' is like the pulse in your body. You can tell by puttin' your finger on it whether everything's runnin' smooth the world over."

"And you think it isn't now?"

Alex pondered.

"Well, my own business is pretty good. But every now an' again I come up against something I can't riddle out. The big bankers are feelin' it. They act sort of scary like. I doubt the wind's risin' somewhere."

"Do you mean another panic?"

But Alex shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "More like it's some sort of a hubbleshoo in Europe. Time'll tell."

On the whole, the winter passed quickly for Meggy. There were the stated holidays to look forward to and occasional week ends upon which to feed her heart. Ranald returned each time cheerful and full of the new interests of college. To his mother's anxious eyes it seemed as though he, too, had been feeling a release from the restraint of his father's presence. It was bitter that this should be so. Meggy experienced no self-pity; she only accepted the fact that she must suffer most from it all, loving them both as she did. It seemed to her that she had never been able to rejoice in her son as fully, as completely, as she knew was possible. Always, somehow, between them Alex's shadow fell.

One day toward the end of the winter she stopped at McKelvey's office to return a book and found Cynthia there alone, working over some papers at the big desk. She was regularly employed now, but this was the first time Meggy had met her when McKelvey was not present. The girl rose, flushed and embarrassed. Meggy looked at her for a moment, seeing her beauty as it must look to Ranald, then with a sudden impulse she took the girl's face between her hands and kissed her.

"Mrs. MacTay!" Cynthia exclaimed in a small voice.

Meggy went on with her errand as though her greeting were in no way unusual.

"I've brought back a book of Uncle Andy's. I'll just put it in his shelves where I got it. May I sit down then and interrupt you for a minute?"

"Of course," Cynthia said, still with surprise in her voice. "Mr. McKelvey's over at the courthouse."

Meggy sat down in the extra chair, wondering how best to ignore all that lay between them.

"Do you like your work?" she asked earnestly.

The girl considered, searching Meggy's face. Then something of the reserve in her own softened a little.

"Of course I hated it at first, but I feel better now. Mr. McKelvey's so kind and so interesting. I'm learning a lot from him—history and literature. And I'm sure my Latin won't get rusty," she added with a smile. "You know how he quotes it! And he always makes me look up the expressions so I'll remember them."

Meggy laughed. "I know. He always did that with Ranald too."

At the name spoken without thought, they looked at each other, and Cynthia slowly flushed scarlet. Meggy kept her eyes fixed tenderly upon the girl, afraid to speak what was in her heart. For as they sat there face to face she felt more keenly than ever the chasm that had to be bridged between Cynthia and her lover. On the one hand lay the bitterness of the Rock-

wells, some of it at least justly held against Alex. On the other lay Alex's long established hate which dated from that first cruel wounding of his pride. Against this background could there be built a secure happiness? How would Rockwell and Sally feel about giving their daughter to MacTay's son? How would Alex feel at the thought of his wealth returning some day to the Rockwell blood?

She knew the answer in both cases. She knew even more. She herself had felt the stress of feeling between her own family and her husband. For years now her father had disliked Alex. Even her mother, calm and gentle and secretive, had never cared for him as for a son. This had troubled the deep waters of her own love as a wife, though the feeling had all been unspoken and carefully covered. How much more serious would be the violence that the children would have to encounter!

She rose with a feeling of panic, uncertain what more to say to the girl before her. She held out her hand, and Cynthia grasped it.

"I hope, my dear, that—that your life will be a happy one."

Then she left, embarrassed that those particular words should have risen unbidden to her lips. As she went down the stairs she tried to reassure herself that she was overfoolish. They were so young. It might be only a boy-and-girl affection that would blow over and be gone. But in her deepest heart she knew there was cause for anxiety. She had seen the light in Ranald's eyes as he spoke of Cynthia. She recognized it, for she had seen it often before in those of his father. And the flush that had overspread the delicate severity of the girl's face just now had not risen from any passing coquetry. She was convinced that they were both suffering in their own way from that first sweet, uncertain pain of love which she herself remembered. She wished desperately—as she had wished in so many cases before—that she could talk it all over with Alex; but since this was not possible she must try to do the best she could alone. She was no longer even able to cheer herself with Jack White's optimistic advice. He

had never been back since the night of her birthday, and there had been no word from him except his usual Christmas gift to Ranald. What Alex had said or done she did not know and feared to ask; but something had evidently taken place between them. She had a hope that while it was final it might not have been bitter. At least Jack knew Alex as well as he knew herself. He would understand and make allowances even when his own heart was heavy. He was like that.

When Ranald returned for the summer Alex announced that he was to start work at once on the engineering corps out at the new mine. Ranald made no comment other than to acquiesce, though Meggy knew he would have preferred pitching hay on the farm. He went and came daily, however, apparently giving satisfaction at the works. How matters were progressing between him and Cynthia, Meggy did not know except that sometimes his eyes were very bright and at others dark and foreboding. On this one matter he did not confide in her, and she respected his silence.

So temporarily content was she, in the fact that he was again at home, that she paid very little attention to Uncle Andy and Alex as they discussed the murder of an archduke and his duchess somewhere in Europe. Busy with her own private problems, she failed to connect this happening with Alex's tension during the ensuing month.

On the 29th of July, however, when he brought home a newspaper with heavy black headlines, and continued to look at it through the evening with drawn brows, Meggy glancing over his shoulder read them with amazement and shock.

Austria Declares War, Rushes Vast Army into Serbia; Russia Masses 80,000 Men on Border.

"War!" she said, distressed. "Not a war! Oh, that's dreadful, isn't it?"

"Aye, an' it may be a lot worse before it's done!" Alex said briefly.

By August 4th the headlines seemed to Meggy and to all av-

erage Americans everywhere to have a closer relation to their own experience and thinking.

British Ultimatum to Germany; Germans Advance Through Belgium.

Uncle Andy, British in inheritance to the last drop of his blood, was violently partisan and anxious from the start. He spent most of his days now poring over the papers from both Pittsburgh and New York. He made endless excuses for visits to the house to talk over the situation, though he soon discovered that Alex's fears were all for business. The run on the Bank of England had affected him more than the invasion of Belgium.

"This is goin' to be bad," he kept repeating. "Bad! The steel market's hit already. Demand fallin' off every day. Where's it goin' to end?"

McKelvey often grew irritated.

"I never heard of a war making poor business! Hold your horses and you'll be making money out of it yet, if that's all that's worrying you." There was faint contempt in his tone. "But if I were a man with a son the age of Ranald I'd be worried about more than the price of steel."

"What do you mean? We're well out of it. It's not our fight, an' it never will be."

"That's what they all say now. 'Our isolated position, our freedom from entangling alliances inspire the cheering assurance that we are in no peril of being drawn into a European quarrel!' I've read six versions of those same sentiments today."

"Well, what's wrong with them?" Alex demanded. "It's the truth. Haven't we got three thousand miles of sea between us?"

Uncle Andy rose and shook his thin fingers in Alex's face.

"Yes, but I'll tell you one thing. If England ever starts getting the worst of it I hope to God the Atlantic Ocean shrinks to the width of a gutter! And I'm counting the cost when I say that," he added bleakly. "I'm counting the cost."

Alex looked up at him quickly as though the word cost had started him on another train of thought.

"Would you like to be makin' a new investment the now?" he asked abruptly.

"No," McKelvey said bitterly. "My mind's not on 'investments.'" Then he sat down again, an expression of interest gradually creeping over his face. "What have you got up your sleeve now, Alex?"

"I've been makin' a few plans this while back, but with the war comin' on I don't know how things'll go. You know the Millvale Iron & Steel Company?"

"Yes, I know of them. Offices in New York, haven't they?"

"That's it. Well, I've been buyin' up a little stock on the quiet, an' I'm goin' to keep on. It's down now, you know. I thought you might be interested."

"Buying up stock, eh? What's the idea? Not a merger, I suppose!"

Alex nodded. "That's just what I have in mind."

McKelvey laughed shortly. "Well, you'll be biting off more than you can chew there. Millvale's as big as your own company. They'll never merge. Why would they?"

Alex leaned forward.

"For a good reason if it's handled right. They need raw material, and I've got it."

McKelvey sat silent for several moments. When he spoke his voice sounded tired.

"I can't keep up with you any more, Alex. You've passed me too far. Besides, I'm old now, and my mind's not on money. Go ahead, though." Then something of his usual humor came into his smile. "For you will, anyway."

With the news on August 29th of the sacking of Louvain, McKelvey's desperate partisanship of the Allies, which had been smiled at in certain quarters of Greensburg, became justified. Opinion there, as in the whole country, suddenly crystallized. Belgium now was the great, comprehensible fact of the war to the American people.

By fall all the young people were singing the new song, "Tip-

perary," with a feeling that dangerous and dramatic excitement was going on somewhere just out of their reach. Ranald talked it all over often with Uncle Andy while Cynthia listened, but when he started blithely on "Tipperary" one evening in the office, McKelvey stopped him.

"Don't sing that here!" he said.

"Why not?" Ranald asked surprised. "It's surely British enough. It's the song all the Tommies are marching to."

"I know, but I can't stand it. '*Martem accendere cantu.*' To kindle war by song! It has to be done, I suppose, but there's something about it breaks my heart. Don't sing it around me."

As Ranald walked home with Cynthia later, he spoke of the matter.

"I'm afraid Uncle Andy's getting queer about this war business. It's bad enough; but after all it's not our fight, and we can't keep worrying over it all the time. Cynthia!"

"Yes."

"Do you realize this is our last evening together?"

"Yes."

"That's more important to me than the war."

She was silent.

"Is it to you?" he asked.

She did not answer him directly. When she spoke her voice was full of suppressed feeling.

"Things are worse than ever with us," she said. "I mean with our family. You can't imagine what it's like to owe everybody and be ashamed to go to a store because the bill's too big already! What I earn doesn't begin to cover everything, and Father's got nothing left now. Nothing! You've no idea what it feels like to see Mother dying by inches and not be able to do anything! And," she added with a sudden flare of bitterness, "you don't know how it feels for me to see you start off gaily to college when I want to go so terribly and can't. That's a little thing compared to all the rest, but all the same it hurts."

Ranald stopped short, a terror at his heart. All summer he

had been aware in his walks and talks with Cynthia that there was still a barrier of the heart between them. Because of this, and feeling keenly her reasons for unhappiness, he had exerted himself to be gay, to cheer her, to present life to her as a joyous adventure with the constant shy implication that they were to share it together. Now, he was stunned at the bitterness in her voice. So she had misunderstood his attitude and thought of him only as carefree and secure, forgetful, perhaps, because of his year away, of all the circumstances that still hedged her in. He started to walk on again beside her, still silent, still wondering what he could say to lift the burden that lay upon them both. He could speak no light word of encouragement or assurance. It must come from the depths of him. So he kept quiet, searching, and as so often happens, the silence had power in it.

He felt her move nearer to him. He heard her sobbing breath.

"I've hurt you, and I never meant to. It's only that I get to feeling so driven, so helpless, so desperate! And I can't talk to anyone. Oh, I shouldn't have said that to you, especially about college—as if I were jealous of you . . ."

In the deep shadow of the street he put his arms about her.

"But you should tell me, Cynthia, everything. I am the only one who understands it all. You know why." He repeated it again very low. "You know why."

For one precious, fleeting moment she clung to him, leaning her slight body against his.

He bent over her, trembling with longing. "Will you kiss me good-bye, Cynthia?"

She drew away, but gently. "I can't, Ranauld. Not just yet. Sometimes, when things are hardest, I'm not quite sure . . ."

"I can wait," he said. "You'll be sure some day. Just remember that I am. Always."

He had to leave her within sight of the house. He had never been back after that one evening, for she had told him, hesitantly, that it would only antagonize her father and distress her mother. He stood now, watching, until she had reached her

door, then strode off home thinking sadly of how his whole calm confidence in a world ordered somehow to concur with his needs had been shaken to pieces in the last eighteen months. Rockwell's failure first, with all the conflict between him and Cynthia; then the new and bitter feeling toward his father of which he could not rid himself; and last of all, the war. For in spite of his casual words just now to Cynthia in regard to it, he thought much about it and often felt his spirit gripped by its stress. He was conscious right now of the fact that in England and in Scotland, his father's own country, there were thousands such as he who instead of starting off to college were heading for the front lines.

When he reached home he stood on the eminence upon which the house was built and studied the bright autumnal sky. The stars shone golden, glittering in their lofty permanence; remote, yet faithfully appearing to the successive generations of men.

"They've looked down on a lot of wars," Ranauld thought to himself. Then his lips curved in a wistful smile. "And, I suppose, on a lot of young men in love."

The business situation which had disturbed Alex at the outbreak of the war grew more serious as the months went on. The demand for steel fell to the vanishing point, and at the turn of the year the whole outlook for American industry was black. But before the new year was far advanced the ghastly necessity of the struggle abroad began to bring business to the steel mills. The new type of trench warfare demanded the protection of barbed wire, hundreds of thousands of miles of it. Alex making frequent trips to New York and Philadelphia managed to hear the first rumors, feel the first straws in the wind, and ultimately to capture some of the first orders. With his usual habit of brushing aside difficulties and adverse opinion he turned part of the Pittsburgh works into a wire mill. By spring the orders were coming steadily from England and France for shrapnel bars, steel for shells, guns, and trucks. Russia also was in the

market for locomotives and steel cars. In a word, business had started to boom.

All the while, Alex kept his eye fixed upon the Millvale Iron & Steel Company. The greatest of all his undertakings now lay before him; an ambition compared to which the others looked petty, now beckoned him. If he could in time bring about a merger between Pittsburgh Iron & Steel and Millvale, with himself as president and chief controller of the stock, administering the affairs of both companies from the New York office—if he could do this it would be the consummate achievement, the goal to which all his previous striving had unconsciously led.

Steadily he kept on buying Millvale stock, watching cannily its shiftings upon the market. For the rest he was waiting for a time and an opportunity that from his study of the situation he considered inevitable. It came one day in May.

Henry Holden, the head of the Millvale Company, dropped in at the Pittsburgh office one morning to arrange for an unusually large order of coke. Alex had known him for years, but now he carefully sized the man up again: honest, keen, straightforward, the type with whom he liked to do business. But there was a line at the mouth that Alex had recognized often in those with whom he had dealt. "He'll take tellin' at the end," he thought with satisfaction.

When the coke order was arranged Mr. Holden still sat on, discussing the present aspects of the war, especially the sinking of the *Lusitania* and President Wilson's new pronouncement that America was "too proud to fight."

Alex kept up his end of the conversation somewhat perfunctorily. He was waiting expectantly for something else which he felt sure would come.

"By the way, MacTay," Holden said at last, "how about some cheap ore? We're needing some just now. I'd be glad to buy it from you."

Alex drew a deep breath. It had come, as he had foreseen it would.

"I'm afraid I can't supply you, Holden. Our business is boomin' just now, an' I don't want to sell ore."

Then he leaned over his desk.

"Has it ever struck you," he said, "that we've each got a strong steel company, but that you're short of raw materials an' we've got plenty?"

Holden eyed him, gravely considering.

Alex went on. "There would be fine advantages for both of us if we merged."

"Merged?" Holden echoed in astonishment.

"The idea's new to you then?"

"Entirely. And I may also add unnecessary and unsatisfactory."

Alex's expression did not change.

"Think it over. You've got some advantages in sellin'. We've got plenty raw material. If we merged we could do bigger business than either of us alone has thought of. An' the time's goin' to be ripe for it, mark you! Think it over. I'll go on to New York any time to talk with you more about it. Or you can stop in here."

When Holden had left, Alex smiled, gratified.

"I've put the bug in his lug anyway. An' I'll not be lettin' him forget it."

The winter just ending had given Meggy a new cause for concern. Uncle Andy had grown frail. He had given up his law practice entirely and spent his days reading the papers, talking with anyone he could find who would listen to his opinions, inveighing bitterly against what he considered the vacillations and inconsistencies of President Wilson, bewailing the fact that Theodore Roosevelt was not in the White House, and suffering with a real and torturing pain over the deadly struggle of the Allies.

After the news of the sinking of the *Lusitania* Meggy, calling at the office, found him in bed, exhausted from his own emotions.

He insisted that Cynthia must stay on to help him even though there was no law business. He dictated long letters to the *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*, to the *New York Tribune*, to his old idol Roosevelt and even to the President himself. His finest vituperation he reserved for William Jennings Bryan, whose policies and speeches were as vitriol in his blood.

Meggy went to sit with him often, and in doing so saw much of Cynthia. A delicate friendship had sprung up between them. Sometimes Meggy only looked at the girl gently; sometimes as on that other day she kissed her and said nothing. But little by little she felt Cynthia's spirit drawing closer to her. Meggy's own heart yearned over her, not only for Ranald's sake but for her own. She tried deliberately to show that she was on the side of the young lovers, hoping thereby to make the pathway a little easier for them; then each time as she left the office she was distressed over her apparent disloyalty to Alex.

When Ranald came home at the end of his second year at college, Alex as well as Meggy noted a change in him. Suddenly, in the last few months he had filled out and taken on weight. He had come at last to his full stature and Alex felt a new and surprising tug of pride when he faced him. For the broad shoulders and strong muscles which he saw now in his son had come by way of himself from Hendry, the blacksmith of Lamson Green.

"Aye, he could lift a coster donkey himself, yon one," Alex thought sometimes complacently.

To Meggy's unspeakable delight he began to talk more freely with Ranald, though always about the business; to seek his society occasionally and voluntarily increase his allowance.

"What's struck Father lately?" Ranald remarked to his mother once when they were alone. "He seems to have taken a sudden fancy to me."

"Why, Ranald, what a strange thing to say about your father!"

"Well, you know how he is. Most of the time when I'm home he hardly seems to know I'm around."

"Ranald!"

"That's the truth. Don't look so sad, Mother. I haven't minded. Really I haven't."

Meggy was pathetic in her earnestness.

"He's always been so busy, Ranald. You must remember what a wonderful career your father has had. All his success that we're enjoying—"

"Oh, are we?" he interrupted ironically.

Meggy looked up at him with fright in her glance.

"Your father has worked so hard, so frightfully hard to reach the position he has. Not one in thousands could have done what he's done. As Pat always says, he's taken it out of his own body. So you must remember how he made the money when you're spending it."

"Don't worry," Ranald said briefly, "I do."

And Meggy felt unhappily that she had made matters worse.

All through that summer, however, Alex's new attitude toward his son persisted. He often spoke now to Meggy of the boy's strength. She could see he was proud of it.

"I like to see a man lookin' like a man," he said. "I think he's got over all them notions he used to have, too. He's settlin' down better than I expected. In another couple years he'll be ready to come into the business. That's been my plan since the day he was born. I think now at last it's beginnin' to shape up."

At that very moment Ranald was sitting beside Cynthia at McKelvey's desk while Uncle Andy dozed in his bedroom, beyond the sound of their voices. They saw each other there now by special arrangement on certain evenings though Ranald was growing more and more restive under the enforced secrecy of their meetings.

"I don't like this business of being clandestine with you, Cynthia," he was saying.

Cynthia laughed. Her manner with him now was easier, with occasional flashes of her old gaiety.

"At least there's a technical propriety about it even if our chaperon is asleep."

Ranald waved this aside and for once did not join her laughter.

"I don't mean that. I mean this constant concealment. We both jump every time there's a step on the stairs for fear it might be my father, or yours. For my part I'd rather go to both of them and tell them straight out—"

She interrupted him with a frightened cry. "Don't do that, Ranald. Promise me you won't. I have to think of Mother, you know. She mustn't be upset, no matter what happens. She seems a little stronger just now, but she's awfully frail. Sometimes I'm afraid it's something—incurable. Then again I'm sure she's really better."

Ranald rose and began to pace up and down the office. All this summer their positions had been reversed. He was now the restless one, with sudden moods of bitterness and resentment. She was gentle, steady, counseling wisdom.

"But your mother's condition, the awful burden on you, the whole situation makes me want to do something, to act! You know," he said turning swiftly to her with his eyes blazing, "you know what I intend to do some day. What I'm going to do!"

Cynthia's hands fluttered over the papers and books on the desk. She must somehow divert him from this new impatience of restraint which seemed to attack him in her presence and with which she was finding it hard to deal.

"Ranald," she said suddenly, "I've been reading your book—you know—the one you and Mr. McKelvey used to discuss so much. You remember?"

She picked up the thin brown volume and Ranald came over to examine it.

"Oh, Ruskin!" he said. "Good old boy! Did you like this?"

"I loved it. It's helped me more than anything I've read since

... well, for some time. I understand better now how you felt about rebuilding the patch."

"Yes," Ranald said bitterly, "and a heap of good it did me! No one will ever know how much I wanted to carry that through!"

"But I think you missed something as you read the book. I found one paragraph that was evidently written just for me, and this one is yours. Look at it! I've marked it for you."

Ranald sat down beside her once more and scanned the fine print where her finger pointed:

And sure good is first in feeding people, then in dressing people, then in lodging people, and lastly in rightly pleasing people, with arts, or sciences, or any other subject of thought.

"You see," Cynthia said earnestly, "that's your writing he's talking about. He puts it on a level with the other great reforms. So now, if you can't change the patch yourself you may write something one day that will move—"

"My father?" Ranald burst out. "Never. It would be like waving a red flag to a bull."

"I certainly didn't mean your father," Cynthia replied hastily. "I meant people in general. And please don't speak to me any more of him. I can't bear it."

For a moment the old cloud settled heavily upon them, then Cynthia resolutely picked up the book again.

"You always said we should read this together. Let's do it now."

At least, she was thinking, it would keep their minds busy, and turn Ranald away from a subject which in spite of her hesitancy he seemed increasingly determined to discuss.

They read on then, pausing occasionally to comment, but for the most part turning the pages in silence. When they reached the last paragraph something happened; something moving and tremendous, yet it was not passion. It was greater than that. It was a union of the spirit born of the knowledge that dangers,

near and far, beset them. Their eyes together followed the printed line:

And then indeed . . . shall abide with us Hope, no more to be quenched by the years that overwhelm, or made ashamed by the shadows that betray . . .

Ranald closed the book.

"I think," he said quietly, "that was written for both of us."

During the fall of 1915 and the early winter of 1916, a new note crept warily into the President's speeches. It was echoed with suppressed fear in the homes of the nation and with a loud and unequivocal challenge in most of the editorials and cartoons of the press. This new note was that of *preparedness*. It was gradually dawning upon America that with or without entangling alliances there was the possibility that it might be necessary for her to play her part in the death struggle abroad. But the pacifists led by Bryan still raised a compelling and often a highly logical voice, and so the average citizen went his way, his war fears rising and falling with the day's news, his judgment colored by his political affiliation.

Meggy began to dread her calls on Uncle Andy at this time. His anger, his vociferation had died down now. Much more terrible to her was the far-away look of resignation to the worst that had come into his old eyes. It was as though he had already traveled the long road that lay ahead and had offered up his sacrifice at the end of it. He still had occasional furious outbursts, but for the most part he talked quietly to old friends in the office or walked slowly about the streets, leaning heavily on his cane. He had lived through all the horror, foreseen the inevitable; he waited now for Time to catch up with him.

Alex, meanwhile, was unusually cheerful. Business was still booming, and his first overture to Holden of the Millvale Iron & Steel Company had been accepted for discussion as he had felt sure it would be. The matter would take months, but Alex felt he could afford to wait. The great, the crowning day would

come at last. In the meantime he kept on buying up the stock.

Just after Christmas Meggy heard through McKelvey that Sally Rockwell was worse. He shook his head with sadness as he told her of it.

"Poor Sally! I'm afraid it's all up with her now. I've tried to do something for her all along, but she's so damned proud I could never get round her. She's had to dree her weird pretty much alone, too, I guess. You see if she'd died quickly a month or so after the failure, the whole town would have rallied round her doorstep. But stretch poverty and sickness out over four years, and see how many friends you've got left! Cynthia's been off all week, so I sent a nurse over and I think they've kept her. At least she hasn't reported back to me."

"What is it, Uncle Andy?"

"Well," he said slowly, "for years Sally must have suspected Rockwell was losing money, but she evidently didn't want to know the truth. I guess it's been about the same with her trouble. When they did find out what it was, it was too late to do anything. At least that's what I gather."

Meggy went slowly down the stairs to the street, considering. The big car stood there, with John at the wheel in his smart livery. She told him to wait where he was. She would never drive up to Sally's door; she would go afoot. For she knew she must go now for all their sakes. In this last extremity she might be received.

When she reached the house, Cynthia opened the door, her face white and anxious. Meggy spoke first.

"I had to come, Cynthia." (She did not know they were the very words Ranauld had once used!) "Do you think I could see your mother?"

Cynthia hesitated, then opened the door wider, and Meggy stepped into the hall.

"She may not know you," the girl said, "but you may come upstairs if you wish."

In the small bedroom, cramped with its furnishings, Sally

lay quiet, the nurse standing watchfully by. But there was no look of recognition in the dark, filmy eyes as Meggy bent over her.

"Mrs. Rockwell," she said, and her voice broke on the name. "Mrs. Rockwell, I'm so sorry."

The phrase sounded childish, inadequate and yet, it was the very burden of that which lay upon Meggy's heart. There was no answer, no sign from the figure on the bed, and Meggy turned away. As she did so she saw herself reflected in the mirror of the tall mahogany dresser before which she had stood the night of the reception long ago.

The whole scene came vividly back to her: the great bed-chamber filled with fashionably dressed women; the laughter, the bright chatter in which she could take no part; the rich velvets and furs upon the bed; the scent of soft perfumes and the whole indefinable air of luxurious living. Meggy saw herself as she had stood there, first in her shy glory, later in her deep humiliation; she saw Sally receiving her guests below, the gay, the beautiful center of all the festive evening. It was life itself she saw now passing through the mirror: life as it had come to her and to Sally.

She went on down the stairs, her eyes hot with tears.

"Is there anything I can do, Cynthia? *Anything?*"

"No," the girl answered with gentle finality. "Nothing. But thank you for coming."

The next week the papers carried the notice of Sally's death. Even then Meggy marveled at the lack of real feeling that was manifested in the circle in which she moved, the circle that Sally had once dominated.

"That's the end of the Rockwells," everyone was saying with a light acceptance, as though the reference were but to the end of a chapter in a book. The news was widely circulated that the home was to be broken up. Rockwell, an old man now, would go to live with one of his sons. Of Cynthia's plans Meggy heard more directly from Uncle Andy.

The girl had known for some time that McKelvey was keeping her on only out of kindness. Now that she was free, she insisted upon finding another position. Uncle Andy had gotten in touch with a firm of Pittsburgh lawyers, old friends of his, and arranged for them to take her.

"I'm doing them the favor," he told Meggy, "in sending Cynthia to them. She's quick and intelligent and has a good knowledge of law business now. I made them raise the ante until she'd have enough to live on. I think it will do her good to get out of Greensburg for a while, but I'm going to be forlorn without her."

Meggy spoke only once to Alex of Sally's death. Then she saw his lips tighten.

"I saw it in the paper," he said briefly.

"It's sad, though, isn't it?" she ventured.

"Well, we all have to go some time," he said, then added decisively, "As I've told you before, Meggy, I have nothin' to do with the Rockwells except to keep clear of them."

In February another piece of news reached Meggy by way of McKelvey. Jack White had been sent over to France by the Central Railroad Company as an observer some months before and had now joined a British regiment of engineers.

"I suppose he couldn't keep out of it once he was over there," McKelvey said wistfully, "and I don't blame him. He'll be a good man for them, too. With all his nonsense, he knows railroads. Here's his letter."

Meggy read the few lines in Jack's scrawling backhand. They ended with this: "I thought I might as well employ myself this way as any other. Some point to it in fact, for I really feel quite useful for the first time in my life and I'm no end important-looking in my uniform! Please let the MacTay family know what I'm about."

Meggy felt with a sick sinking of the heart that the war had already come close to them. Would it come still closer? Alex's only answer to all her frightened questions was that he would

cross no bridges till he came to them. She did not tell him the news of Jack. Apparently Alex wished the name to remain unspoken between them; but she felt sure he must know from Uncle Andy. She wrote Ranald at once and kept waiting with a greater eagerness than usual for the spring and his return from college.

The warm sun came again at last, the April rains and the blooming lilacs. But before she knew it the white blossoms were dying on the tops of the trees. There would still be summer to come; but to Meggy it seemed this year, more than any other, that the first perfume of spring, like youth itself, was lost too quickly.

Ranald, meanwhile, was checking off the weeks in his calendar with a furious unrest in his heart. He had not seen Cynthia since Christmas, though her letters had grown more frequent and more revealing since the first shock of her mother's death had passed.

He had finally won her consent to a meeting in May when she would come to Greensburg to spend the week end with a friend, at a time when he could return home without causing undue complications. But though he counted each intervening day as it passed, he did not feel safe in his desperate longing until on the bright Sunday afternoon appointed he and Cynthia actually found themselves together on the slope of a green hill, with the town and all its observers far behind them. He had been obdurate about the country.

"I refuse," he said, "to talk to you this time in the presence of any other human being, even Uncle Andy asleep!"

So he had managed to get the small car for the afternoon and had brought her by quiet back roads to a spot he knew and loved.

They talked here with a new freedom. Old pent secrets of their lives rose to their lips for the first time. The deep, long thoughts of their youth trembled into expression. Between were silences sweeter even than the speech. Cynthia sat on the long

grass while Ranald threw himself full length beside her, resting on his elbows as he looked up into her face. All around them was the perfume of May-apples and thorn blossoms, and the delicate but overpowering feeling of spring quickening in the air.

"It's a lovely world." Cynthia spoke suddenly, looking from their hilly vantage point across the fair stretches of country. "In spite of all the sorrow and the tragedy, it's a lovely world. I can't bear to think of its ever, ever ending!"

"Why should it?" Ranald asked.

"There's a minister in Pittsburgh who is always talking about it. He thinks the war in Europe is just the fulfillment of prophecy, and he harps away on *Armageddon* until I'm almost afraid to look at the eastern sky for fear I see Gabriel up there ready to blow his last trump at me!"

Ranald laughed. "What a silly idea!"

Then with his quick, unfailing sympathy, his tone changed.

"You're not in earnest about being frightened, are you?"

She hesitated, flushing under his gaze.

"Of course not, really. But I have a kind of heavy, unhappy feeling when anybody says 'the end of the world.' I guess it's because once, when I was a little girl, an old man visited us who said the world was supposed to end that very month. I know now the grown-ups were only arguing and no one dreamed I was taking it all in earnest. But I was. I used to waken in the night in a panic and run to the window to see if the stars were still out. And in the daytime I would keep saying my prayers and watching the sky to see if anything was happening up there. I know it sounds funny," she added.

"Not to me," Ranald said tenderly. "You poor, scared little kid! Didn't you tell your mother?"

Cynthia shook her head. "No. I've never told anybody till now. I don't know why I tell you all my heart's secrets, Ranald."

He sat up suddenly and leaned close.

"There's still one you haven't told me," he whispered.

Her face with its rich color beneath the smooth, dark skin was turned away from him. But he could see the long lashes on her cheeks, the arching eyebrows like thin little wings, the curve of her lips, the fluttering throb of breath in her throat. All the high-born beauty of her body, the pride, the grace, stormed his heart as it had never done before. He felt his own strength born for this moment.

"Cynthia! I have to know."

So they sat, their shoulders touching, their faces near, with only the faint sound of their hurried breathing and a bird song from the tree near by, in their ears. This moment in which the complete knowledge of their love grew upon them, with the flooding assurance of what its fulfillment would bring, held them silent, trembling, and tense.

At last Cynthia turned toward him. The yielding movement spoke for her better than words. He caught her to him with all his strength, and, at last, his lips met hers.

When they rose to go, at sunset, they paused to look again at the green hill, their own now, and sanctified because of what had happened there.

"We must come back here every year," Ranald was saying, "every springtime as long as we live."

Suddenly he felt her clinging to him in terror.

"What if it's our own world that's going to end, Ranald? What if we can't count on the years, the way everything is now! I can't bear the thought. I can't bear it!"

"Listen!" He stood very straight and strong, holding her close to him. His eyes had in them that deep, tremulous light that had come to him from other eyes long dead. "I know what you mean. I know all that may be ahead of us. But I'm sure that, come what may, we are still going to live out our love together. It's a strange feeling, this certainty. It's as though someone I could thoroughly trust had told me so. We must believe it, Cynthia. We must hang on to our Hope, you know, 'that is not to be quenched by the years that overwhelm.'"

And with this comforting, they left the hill and set out for the town.

It seemed to Meggy a very long month between Ranald's sudden week end at home in May and his final return in June, for this year he was staying over until after Commencement. She had added some new articles to his room which she thought would please him, and she had begged of Alex to let him have at least a week at the farm before starting work again at the mines. When he came, however, he was serious and silent; but he brightened over the idea of a week at the farm and bore his mother off with him. They both relaxed in the familiar atmosphere; Meggy visited with Tirzah while Ranald and Bill wandered about, working together spasmodically, talking steadily, chuckling over their own peculiar jokes as they had always done.

When the time came to leave, Ranald seemed in better spirits.

"Oh, that was a good week!" he confided to Meggy on the way home. "I feel ready now—"

"For work?" Meggy queried as he stopped.

"For anything that comes," he answered.

That night at dinner Alex was in an unusually genial mood. He kept watching Ranald, the gratified look that had been growing of late showing clearly in his eyes. When the meal was ended he leaned back comfortably in his chair and lighted a cigar.

"Well," he began, "you'd better be gettin' to work tomorrow. I've been plannin' the summer for you. I want you to work with Gilly at the Scotia. Pat's a good man, but Gilly's known the coal business since he was a boy goin' into the Scotch pits with his father. He's the one to give you the best idea about runnin' a mine. I've told him you'd be out, an' he's pleased to take you on with him."

Ranald slowly extinguished his cigarette. His face for a young man was very grave indeed.

"I think it's only fair to tell you now," he said, "that I'm not interested in the coal business."

Alex gave him one quick look, then rose to his feet.

"Come into the other room," he said shortly.

Ranald followed him, leaving Meggy alone at the table.

They stood in the paneled library, strong men, both of them, grimly facing each other.

"It's time we got things settled once for all," Alex said, his intensity making his voice harsh.

"I quite agree with you, Father." Of the two Ranald was the more controlled.

"What did you mean by sayin' just now what you did about the coal business?"

"Just what I said. I'm not interested in it and never will be."

"You're not *interested*?" Alex shouted. "That's fine, highfalutin talk for you to give me! Me, that's built up this business from the bottom to a basis of millions! Now when all you've got to do is to step into it with me you say you're not *interested*!"

Ranald shook his head. "I hate everything about a coal works. I hate the smell of the mine. I hate the dirt of the coke yards. The sight of a tippie makes me sick at my stomach. I hate what the coal business has done to this whole countryside. And then, I always think—"

"Well, an' what do you think?" Alex's tone was increasingly harsh. Something in it struck flint in Ranald's soul. He took a step nearer his father.

"All right, if you ask for it, I'll tell you what I think! I think about the hunkies in the patch that I wanted to do something for and you wouldn't let me. You've been taking advantage of them all these years. You say you pay them fair wages, but that's as little as you dare. Then you make them buy at the company store and you get the profits from that. They spend all the rest they make getting drunk on beer Saturday nights, and you get a rake-off on the beer wagons, too, I suppose!"

"That's a lie. I've never taken a cent from the wagons."

"Well, I'll bet somebody round there does. You can't tell me that chance for profit was passed up. Isn't that so?"

Alex hesitated for the merest second.

"You may have me there, but I tell you I never took a penny from them. An' I've run my works as well as any operator in Pennsylvania. I'll put my patches up alongside—"

"All right. Let's forget the patch. But look at the farm. You wanted that for a new development. I know the whole story. I got it from Grandfather. He wouldn't sell to you because he knew Mother loved the place so. She'd never have gotten over the loss of it, and neither would I. But you would have bought it if you could. You would have ruined even that to make more money for yourself!"

Alex's face was scarlet now, and he was breathing heavily under one of his rare and terrible bursts of anger.

"Stop it!" he shouted. "I'll have no son of mine talkin' like this to me!"

"I'll not stop till I've finished," Ranauld answered. "We've got to have this out some time."

Alex saw his eyes growing darker and his chin set like iron even as his own.

"There's one thing more. I think I could forgive you everything but what you've done to—Cynthia."

The name, spoken so quietly, seemed to remain vibrating in the air between them. If Ranauld had struck him full in the face, Alex could not have felt a greater shock. After his ultimatum in the library the morning after Rockwell's failure was known, he had never dreamed that the matter of the girl was not settled completely.

"I told you before you were to stop seein' her! I told you before I'd have no Rockwells mixed up with my family. There's been bad blood between us too long. Now mind you, you're to have nothin' more to do with her! Do you hear me?"

"You can't dictate to me about that, Father. I love Cynthia

and I intend to marry her. That is, if I can keep her from remembering I'm your son."

Alex's face was convulsed. "You're mad!" he burst out. "You, talkin' about love an' marriage at your age! What do you know about it?"

"I'm as old as you were when you came to this country. I guess you knew what love was when you were twenty-one."

"An' what if I did? I didn't play the fool about it. You'll give me your word you won't go ahead with this girl! Give me your promise an' keep it, or by God, I'll make you!"

"How?"

The simple monosyllable stung Alex to greater anger.

"How? Well, I'll tell you how. If you go on with the girl, you'll never have a cent of my money! An' I guess you know me well enough to realize I'll do as I say."

He straightened as he said this, once more invincible. All the power of the years was in his voice; all the assurance his great weapon had given him in his face.

Ranald smiled, but it might better have been a sword thrust.

"I don't want your money," he said. "I'm going into Pittsburgh and try to get a job on a newspaper. I'm going to keep on with my writing. I'm going to earn my own living somehow and marry the girl I love. She would starve rather than live on your money anyhow. This is what I'm going to do, and you nor nothing else under heaven can stop me."

Alex watched him turn on his heel and leave the room. As he did so there arose in his mind from out the years the vision of another youth with an implacable face. He heard another voice, as final, as relentless.

"Let's have no more bletherin' about the Laird, Mother. My heart's set on Americky an' there's nothing can change me now."

And as he listened to this echo, the fury went out of him. He felt weak and for the first time old. A sense of impotence

crept over him as though the bitterness of his heart was seeping through his veins.

"I don't want your money," the boy had said, lightly and with a gesture of indifference.

Alex sat down beside the table, his heavy shoulders bowed. He scarcely heard the sound of voices from above during the next hour or the feet on the stairway. He did not know Meggy had entered the room until her voice aroused him.

"Alex!"

At the tone he straightened and rose. He had heard it but once before, but he still remembered.

"What have you done?" she cried. "What have you done to Ranald?"

She had expected to find him hard in his anger. Now that he said nothing his quietness sent counter waves of distress through her brain.

"He has left, Alex. He has taken his things. He says he's not coming back. You must do something. You must!" Her distress was piteous. "What did you say to him about—Cynthia?"

Alex spoke then.

"You knew he's been still seein' her?"

"Yes. I knew."

"But you kept it from me."

"What else could I do? I love him so. I want him to be happy."

"I have told him," Alex said heavily, "that if he marries her I'll cut him off without a penny. An' I'll do it."

Meggy stood very still. Then she said with slow irony: "And what about me? Will you drive me also from your house? For I love Cynthia too. All these years I've longed for my own daughter. Cynthia would take the place. Ranald knows how I feel about her, and so does she. And I must tell you something else. I went to see Sally Rockwell when she was dying. I told her I was sorry for all that had happened. I did that. And I would do it again."

There was silence; then she began to realize that Alex had not been following her confession. He was looking at her without seeing her. She noticed that his shoulders were sagging as if pressed down by the first weight they found insupportable.

"He said," Alex repeated slowly, under his breath, "'I don't want your money.'"

So that was the bitterness that rose in him above everything else. She could hear Ranald's scornful young voice as he said it. And suddenly now, as it had ever been, her heart came back to Alex as the tide returns to the rocks upon which it breaks. It was not Ranald who was most to be pitied.

She moved closer to her husband.

"You wouldn't have thought he'd have said that to me, would you? After all the years I've been workin' to make it. It's not to be despised like that—a fortune." His voice gathered force. "An' I'm not through yet, mind you! I'm not through yet!"

In the hard days that followed, Meggy worked out her own philosophy of submission. The pain of it all was not new. It was only the old one made more acute. The bitterness she had felt toward Alex in those hours of Ranald's departure had changed when she discovered that it was the father who had sustained the enduring hurt. After hours of pondering with full knowledge of every fact involved, she had settled upon one request. It was that Alex would write to Ranald asking him to come back home again.

At first he refused flatly. "I've said all I'm goin' to say to him. The rest is in his own hands. I've told you that."

"But you don't need to make any concession if—if you are determined not to. Only let him know his home is open to him always. That much, Alex, I beg of you."

"I've said my last word to him. If he's bound to make his own bed, let him lie in it."

"You must do what I ask, Alex. You must." Her voice was low, but it did not falter. "If you want my love."

He looked at her strangely, saying nothing. But a few days

later a letter came from Ranald which Meggy read and read again, and kept close to her heart.

Dear Mother:

I felt like a cad when I left you last week to battle with Father alone. You must have come out pretty well with it, though, for his letter which has just come is almost conciliatory—on all the unimportant points! Of course I'll be back to see you, but not to stay, Mother. I can't under the circumstances. I've got to make my own way for several reasons. And here's big news! I've landed a job on the *Gazette-Times*. The pay isn't much to begin with, but there's a chance for an increase; and you can bet I'll be on the jump for it. I've got a comfortable enough room out in East Liberty and I'm going to do some writing in the evenings. I have the most outrageous contentment with the whole present scheme of things. I like the feel of earning my own living; I like my job; and the sight of my little room at night with its desk covered with reams of white paper ready to receive my scintillating thoughts stirs in me a great feeling of satisfaction and ambition. If you can imagine the two feelings at the same time!

Most important of all, though, of course, I can see Cynthia often and openly. We have dinner together sometimes in the evenings and go for walks or to a nickelodeon. Her boarding-house parlor is ghastly as far as entertaining callers goes. A lot of nosy nondescripts sit around the walls crocheting and eye me up and down when I stop for her. The word has gone round apparently that I'm that desperate character known as "a rich man's son" and therefore by nature a betrayer of young womanhood. They've even warned Cynthia to check up on my intentions, and we have great laughs over it. It's not all laughter between us, though, as you may imagine. But we've settled one thing, Mother. I feel I ought to tell you. If we get into the war—or perhaps I should say when we do, for I feel sure it's only a matter of time—Cynthia and I are going to be married at once and have some sort of honeymoon before I enlist. For I'll have to, of course. With a name like mine I couldn't very well stay out of a fight, though I loathe the thought with every

ounce of me. Don't worry, though. It may never come after all. Or I may turn out to have flat feet! Meanwhile, I'm happier than I've been for a long time in having got the air cleared with Father.

Good-bye now, Mrs. Meggy MacTay, bless your precious heart! Nobody ever had a sweeter mother or ever will—unless it's my own brats some day. (I hope that doesn't shock you!) I'll try to get out Sunday week. And listen, Mother dear, *don't* worry about me!

Love always,

RANALD

That evening Alex drew another letter from his pocket and handed it to her without comment. It ran as follows:

Dear Father:

I greatly appreciate your writing to me in regard to returning home to live, but I have already secured a position on the Pittsburgh Gazette-Times which promises well, and I feel it is much better to have a room here near my work. I will run out to Greensburg sometimes at week ends. Hoping you and Mother are both well, and with thanks again for your kindness, I remain, your affectionate son,

RANALD

Through the summer, as though to turn his mind from the deep hurt and disappointment of what he considered Ranald's overwhelming defection, Alex plunged into his plans for the great merger with Millvale Iron & Steel. The time, as he had told Holden before, was indeed ripe. The steel business was steadily increasing, and other mergers, too, were in the air: Bethlehem with Cambria; Warwick Iron & Steel with Eastern. All the preliminary work for his own plan had been accomplished. He held now 10 per cent of the Millvale stock, and he had gradually won Holden over to the idea. There stretched ahead several months of careful negotiation, board meetings, private conferences, argument, compromise, technical details

and finally, he was sure, the victory of this his greatest achievement.

He was driving himself again, Meggy realized anxiously, and for the first time he showed it by more than his usual abstraction and tension.

"Are you not well, Alex?" she asked him once as she saw him wince as from pain.

"A bit of a turn now an' again. Indigestion, I doubt."

"Won't you please see a doctor?"

"Tut! I can't be bothered with doctors. I'm never sick. You know that."

"But you might be."

"There's nothing wrong with me! An' the merger's workin' out, Meggy. A clean, sound business deal. The only thing that's ticklish is who's to be president of the new concern. But," he added with a look of satisfaction, "I've an idea I can manage that, too."

With the cooler weather he was tireless again; prices were still rising; business had never been so good. With an unflagging strength, a furious vitality, he administered his widening affairs, making many trips to Philadelphia and New York between his constant ones to Pittsburgh.

McKelvey, at the house one day, looked after Alex as he left it.

"He shakes the place when he walks through it, doesn't he? I can't keep up with him now. What's he at? Still the merger?"

"Yes. He's so very much interested in it. He feels if he can just get it put through—"

"Oh, he will! Sit down, Meggy, I want to talk to you about the campaign."

All Uncle Andy wanted these days was an audience, and Meggy, lonely herself, gladly gave it. Thanks to him she followed the speeches and the daily news with some intelligence, trying hard to sympathize with his desire that Hughes and the Republicans should win even while her own heart hoped for

Wilson because of the peace he so definitely promised. Alex was in New York at the time of the election, and so Meggy lived with Uncle Andy through those three strange nights and days of doubt when the Republicans first claimed victory only to be compelled to relinquish it in bitterness at last. Uncle Andy, pitched from jubilation to despair, was inconsolable.

"I've had all I can stand. Between the war abroad and politics at home I'm worn out. I'm going to settle down to Horace, and try to keep my mind off the world. It's time I was on my way to another one, anyway."

"Don't talk like that, Uncle Andy."

"It's true. You know about old Tom Callaghan back in the country here. He lived to be a hundred, and the neighbors all said the Lord had just clean forgot about him. I'm beginning to think he's overlooked me too."

Meggy tried to laugh him into good spirits again, but she realized that Ranald's break with Alex had been a heavy blow to him. Like her, he loved them both. Besides, he was bitterly disappointed at Ranald's not finishing college. He had set his heart upon attending the graduation and going over all the old scenes together. Now he could only scrutinize the *Gazette-Times* with more care than usual and write long letters to Pittsburgh full of wise counsel and affection.

By the end of December Alex announced to Meggy triumphantly that everything was ready for the last act, as it were, in the drama of the merger. All difficulties had been smoothed out, delays overcome, compromises effected.

"We're all ready now to sign up the agreement. I'll be goin' to New York for the first week in January."

"For the whole week?" Meggy asked in dismay. His trips were usually short ones.

"Aye, it'll be all of that an' more. I'm takin' my lawyers from Pittsburgh, and Holden will have his there. It'll keep us all busy workin' day an' night on the details. Then when this agreement's finished it'll be presented at the stockholders' meetin's

of the two companies the last of the month. There's no question about it now. It's as good as done. I wonder do you realize, Meggy, what a big—a tremendous thing this is goin' to be for me!"

"I'm so glad, Alex, for your sake, but I wish the business wasn't going to take a whole week."

"Would you like to come along?" he asked suddenly. "But I can't be with you there, mind. Not for a minute."

"No," Meggy said, smiling. "I'll keep busy here. I always miss you, though, terribly."

He took her face between his hands and scrutinized it with care.

"You look tired-lookin'," he said before he kissed her. "I'll tell you what I'll do. When I get back from New York I'll have a couple weeks let-up. I'll take you on a little trip." He glanced over his shoulder to be doubly sure none of the servants were anywhere near. "We'll make it another honeymoon."

"Could we really go away for a little while together, and forget all about business for once, and—and other troubles and everything? Just relax and be happy?"

"We'll be doin' it. I think I've neglected that. But there's always been such a big load on my shoulders. Besides you never asked me for it before. You've never asked me for much, Meggy. Mind, when the merger's gone through I can get you well-nigh anything you'd like."

Meggy smiled up at him bravely. "I'll make a long list," she said, "of very, very expensive desires and have it all ready for you when you get back."

"Will you?" he asked eagerly, and the sudden happiness in his face smote her. "Aye, that would please me, you know. I'd like to be gettin' you the best there is."

He left on Sunday night. All through that week of snow and sleet Meggy kept indoors. Sometimes Anna saw her walking up and down the long drawing-room, stopping to lay her hand softly on those pieces of furniture that had come from the little

brick house, or standing for long minutes before the oil painting of the sea. She tried to keep busy at various small tasks; she called up the folks at the farm and talked with them, and also with Uncle Andy and with Ranald. They were all as well as usual and Ranald was still happy, and interested in his job. In spite of all this, and the thought of the coming trip which she craved at this time, a heaviness rested upon her, half physical, half of the spirit. Alex never wrote to her when he was away; he always wired or called her. But now the long week passed, and there was no word of any sort.

She was roused one night from a fitful sleep. She was wide awake at once, and turned on the light. It was three o'clock, and the telephone was ringing in the next room. She ran to it quickly and took down the receiver. Her voice was hoarse and anxious.

"Hello."

"Meggy!"

"Oh, Alex, are you all right? Is anything the matter?"

"Not a thing. I'm just now gettin' to bed an' I wanted to hear your voice before I went to sleep."

Meggy laughed.

"I'm relieved. And I'm so glad to hear you. Is your business finished?"

"Aye. We're shed of it now. But it's been a big job. We've worked night an' day since we got here. I've had no sleep for a week worth mentionin'. Are you all right?"

"Yes, of course. When will you be home?"

"Tomorrow evenin'. I'll get in about six, tell John."

"Oh, that's good!"

"You sound shivery. Have you got your wrapper on you?"

"No. I didn't wait for it."

"Well, hurry back into bed then, an' don't be catchin' cold. Meggy . . ."

"Yes?"

His voice dropped to a lower note.

"I wish I was with you now!"

"I know. So do I. But tomorrow's soon here."

"That's right. Good night, Meggy."

"Good night, dear."

All the next day Meggy went about preparing happily for Alex's return. That expectation now rose above everything else. Anna would cook his favorite dishes for dinner; John would have the car shining for the trip to the station; wood was freshly laid on all the andirons, for Alex loved an open fire; there were flowers on the dining table and on the bureau in their own room. With a little snatch of song on her lips, she weighed the matter of which dress she would wear that evening. The smallest detail of his home-coming engaged her utterly.

When he came, the emptiness of the past week disappeared as by magic. The whole house from drawing room to kitchen woke as usual to his presence.

He ate heartily at dinner, praising the food. "It's the first good meal I've had since I left, an' I can't seem to get enough of it!" he kept saying. "Ah, it's good to be home!"

But though his eyes were bright now as they looked at her, Meggy knew from his face that he was very tired.

"Let's be goin' on up as soon as we're finished here," he proposed. "I think I'll settle down early for a good rest. It's been a hard week, this."

Once in their own room, however, his face flushed with strong inner excitement. He stood with his back to the fire, his head thrown up in an expression of triumph.

"The thing's done now, Meggy! The thing's done! There's no doubt about the stockholders. They'll approve. We've got everything in shape. An' I'm to be the new President! President of Pittsburgh & Millvale Consolidated. I believe without my ever knowin' it, it's for this I've been pushin' myself, drivin' myself all along. Do you see what it'll mean, Meggy? There's no end now to it, mind! I can see the possibilities stretchin'

away ahead of me! I can feel the new power comin'! I tell you I'm *lifted* over this thing more than . . ."

With the sentence unfinished his breath caught in his throat. He clutched for the mantelshelf, missed it and fell heavily to the floor at her feet.

When the doctor came he went about his examination swiftly, then explained to Meggy in all gentleness that there was nothing he could do. He tried to lead her from the room, but she refused to go. She even put forth her strength to help as John and the doctor lifted Alex to the bed.

"You are a brave woman, Mrs. MacTay," the doctor kept repeating over and over.

When she heard him she spoke through a daze, without taking her eyes from Alex's face.

"I would go with him all the way if I could."

At last she was alone as she begged them to let her be alone with her dead. She went to the adjoining room and called Ranald in a voice that seemed to come from far other lips than her own. She told him simply, briefly, the terrible fact.

"Come as soon as you can, Ranald, and please bring Cynthia with you. That is my wish. It will help me to have you come together. Wait for me in the drawing room. I'll come down at once."

She did not stay to answer his frenzied questions. She went back to the bed. Later there would be upon the stairs the professional feet of those who must perform their offices. She shuddered. This little space, an hour, perhaps, was all she might have with him. They two, alone, in this room of a thousand memories.

She looked down upon him as he lay: the strong man defenseless, the powerful limbs stricken, the hands nerveless, with life—at least upon this planet—behind him now. Only around and upon him, shutting her away, the white stillness like bars against which her heart beat in its anguish.

"Alex! Alex!"

She sank upon her knees beside the bed, laying her head upon his silent breast. As far as she knew he had never uttered a prayer. And she could not cry to heaven now as she desired to do. She could only cry to him.

"Alex! Alex!"

But there was no voice nor any that regarded.

So she knelt, her face against the rough tweed of his coat, her hands gripping his arms that now for the first time did not gather her swiftly to him.

When she heard the car in the drive and Ranald's voice at the door, she rose and said her real farewell.

She went slowly down the stairs. Not her own death, not even that of Ranald with his youth could have caused this emptiness, this strange cessation, as though even the inanimate pieces of furniture had now lost the reason for their continuance.

She went on slowly, numbly, through the wide hall that had been Alex's pride. The silence around her seemed as final, as absolute as it was in the room above; as it was in her heart. Time had ceased. The universe had stopped in its course. The restless, wandering stars were still at last.

She knew, though she heard no voice, that Ranald and Cynthia were in the drawing room. She felt them there surely, as though now without let or hindrance her spirit could commune with theirs. She knew where they would be standing, what they would be thinking, what expression would be upon their faces. It was as though there were no wall now between her and them.

So, when she entered the room, her eyes gave back to her only her inner vision intensified; for they were standing before the fire as she had pictured them, their hands clasped, their heads bowed.

They did not hear her. Meggy swayed and caught at a chair for support. It seemed to her that she, too, might fall lifeless under the burden of this agony. Then, as she waited, watching them, the truth, like light, slowly broke through the blackness of her desolation.

In all the years with Alex, as she had yielded herself up to his will there had been joy, ecstasy even, along with the struggle and the pain. There had been in their love ever the power of the whirlwind; but never the still, small voice of—peace. Now, by the extremity of this release she would have it; and with it, at last, her son.

She straightened, steadied herself and moved toward the lovers. They heard her and turned quickly, but something in her white face stopped the words on their lips. There was no need of speech, however, for now they were one. Perhaps, Meggy thought, through the great mystery of death, all one. And suddenly she knew by what token this should be so. She reached to her throat and loosed the gold thistle; then, with fingers that did not tremble, she fastened it upon the girl's breast.

